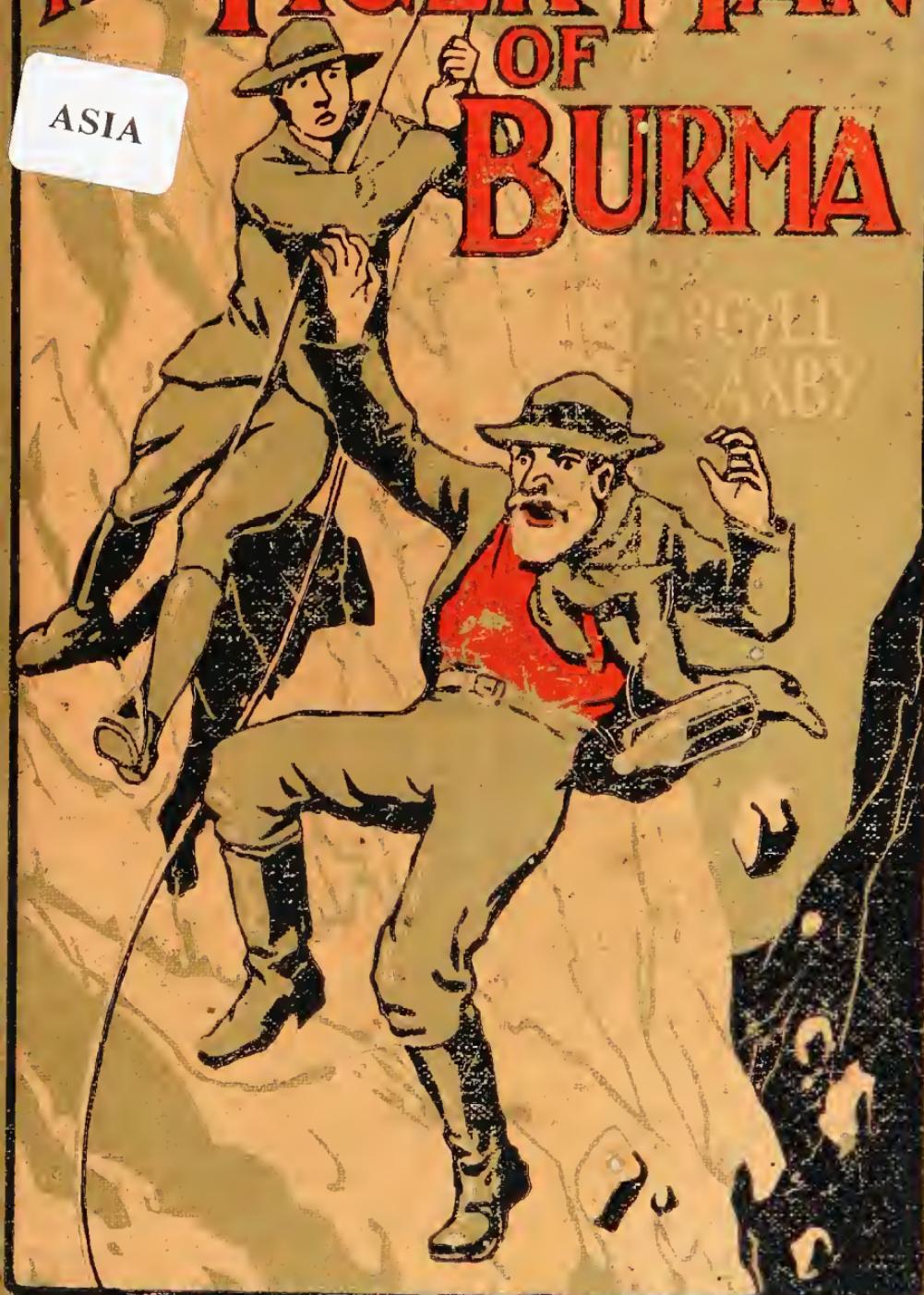


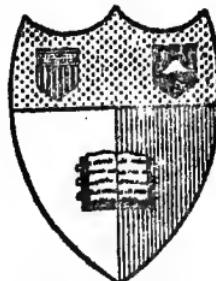
# THE TIGER-MAN OF BURMA

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"YOU--YOU--SON OF A JACKAL!"

# THE TIGER-MAN OF BURMA

AND OTHER ADVENTURE YARNS

By  
**ARGYLL SAXBY**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
**T. W. R. WHITWELL**

LONDON  
“BOY'S OWN PAPER” OFFICE  
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# THE TIGER-MAN OF BURMA

## CHAPTER I

### VOWED TO VENGEANCE

“**N**O,” said Captain Forrester, Police Commissioner, with military firmness. “Under no circumstances would I sanction such a proposition, far less give it approval, Bob. Tha Zan is a dacoit (robber) without fear or feelings. The man who attempts to capture that scoundrel and his murderous gang, in Upper Burma, is taking his life in his hands. Many have tried, none has succeeded.”

“But the luck might be with me,” the boy persisted, despite the stern expression on his guardian’s face. “You never can tell what might happen——”

“Exactly!” was the sharp rejoinder. “You never can tell what will happen when you are dealing with a man like Tha Zan. If you fell into his hands he would be as likely to skin you alive as look at you. I do not exaggerate in the least. Skinning his enemies is a favourite sport with that Burman dacoit. He has not made the experiment yet with an Englishman, but he is capable of anything if he thinks he is being pressed too closely.

“I am not unsympathetic, Harwood. I don’t forget what you have lost through that man, but I have also to remember my position as an officer of

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the Crown, as well as your guardian. You are dealing with a panther when you are dealing with Tha Zan. His capture is the duty of the police—not that of a civilian."

The boy's face flushed at the discouraging words of the Commissioner, and there was just a slight quiver of his lips as he said :

" I can never forget, sir, that it was Tha Zan who killed my parents when they were camping in the jungle, ten years ago—when I was a small kid. It seems a long time ago, but it has been in my mind every day. My father never harmed any person in his life. He wouldn't even carry a shot-gun, for he hated taking life. All he lived for was books—and making books. And yet—for the sake of a hundred rupees or so——"

" I know—I know," interrupted the officer, in gentler tones. " It has not been only for the sake of duty that I tried my best to lay the dacoit by the heels until he disappeared from the district. Now that there are signs of his return, you may be sure that I shall leave no stone unturned to effect my purpose. Your father was my dearest friend. So you can leave the matter in my hands. Tha Zan's day of reckoning will come."

" My father's son will pay the debt," returned Harwood in low, firm tones. " Every day since—since that horrible time I have vowed to be revenged as soon as I was old enough. It hasn't been that I have not been grateful to you for looking after me and giving me an education. I have really done my best to please you."

" And you have pleased me, Bob," assented the

Commissioner. "Now you can best please me by beginning the work that I have planned for you in the secretariat department. You can commence there as soon as your holidays are over. It will be a good start for you."

But the lad's determination was not yet shaken.

"As soon as I come back from camp I'll do all I can to show you how thankful I am. But, before that—Well, I cannot give up what I have been living for all these years! I feel that I would be lying to my father if I did."

Captain Forrester shook his head at the boy's words.

"I am very sorry to refuse you anything, Bob—especially this on which you have fixed your mind. If you were older it might be different; but even then I would be doubtful if it were my duty to permit you to undertake something so irregular. As I said before, it is a police job. Besides, if it were known that I had sanctioned such a thing, and any calamity befell you, the Government would certainly reward me with the dismissal which I should deserve."

"But—if I succeeded—If nothing happened to me?" Harwood persisted in eager tones born of the very thought of the possible success of his vow. "If I were to succeed?"

The Commissioner shrugged his shoulders and smiled as he replied:

"All things are forgiven to the successful man. Two thousand rupees is the reward for taking Tha Zan alive; five hundred if dead." Then the speaker quickly resumed his usual official manner, remarking, as he turned to the business papers on the table, "It's

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no use talking further, Bob. Take my advice and dismiss the whole affair from your mind—for the time being, at least. You have earned your holiday by passing these exams., so take your tent to the jungle for a week or two, as planned. Your *loongi* (servant) will go with you. He is a capital *shikaree* (hunter), as we all know, so you ought to have fine sport. Now, I must get to work. There is a heap to be done before lunch-time. So, good-bye for the present. Have a good time, and leave the police to their own job. Tha Zan's freedom will be brief, now that he has been bold enough to begin his old operations again."

With these words the Commissioner shook hands with the boy, and in another moment was buried in the mass of official papers awaiting his attention. Obediently Harwood left the office, walking direct to the bungalow that stood but a short distance away in the compound. Then he went straight to his room, the floor of which was heaped with all the usual paraphernalia for camping. Then he called sharply for his servant :

" Pan Yi! Pan Yi!"

" Sahib!" came the immediate answer from near at hand, and in a few moments a Burman entered in obedience to the call.

No person could see Pan Yi for the first time and not feel the wish to continue looking, for a finer type of manhood it would be almost impossible to imagine. In the first place he was a veritable giant in height, as he was also gigantic in breadth. As he had been engaged in some arduous work, he had discarded upper covering, displaying muscles that betokened strength as of a lion.

Like most strong men, he was one of the most good-natured. When he was roused to anger, his round face and massive jaws set themselves in a hard mould of almost animal fury. But at ordinary times his smile was something that cheered everybody who looked upon it. He never did anything else but smile upon his young master, whom he had served since the boy was a baby.

"Pan Yi! We start immediately," said Bob shortly, as soon as the man appeared.

Instantly an expression of eagerness flashed over the Burman's face.

"The Commissioner Sahib?" he asked excitedly in the Indian manner of address, which has been generally adopted since Hindi became one of the official languages of the country. "Does the Commissioner Sahib give permission?"

Harwood shook his head as he bent to examine a rifle preparatory to putting it in a case.

"The Commissioner Sahib says I am mad—or words to that effect. He refuses to give permission, but"—and the boy half turned his head as he looked at the Burman with a sly smile—"he didn't forbid me to go!"

"Good, master—very good!" chuckled Pan Yi. "We would not go if Commissioner Sahib say not go, but if he just say master some fool, or much mad—that very good business." And the merry servant laughed merrily at his own witticism. Then he bent closely to Bob with a serious air of mystery. "Master! I have news to-day—good news—about Tha Zan!"

At the mention of that name of terrible memories Harwood could not help starting slightly, for, although

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Pan Yi was in his confidence, and the report was known that the dacoit was somewhere in the district, little definite information had been obtainable. The boy had expected that a considerable amount of searching would have to be undertaken before the outlaw was located.

" You have heard of him ? You know where he is ? " Bob asked with ill-controlled excitement.

" He has been seen in the jungle—near Maymyo—close to village Shwe Nan," said the Burman. " The gardener has a brother who lives at Shwe Nan, and he tell me that Tha Zan seen there with many horses for riding."

" Good ! " exclaimed Harwood with delight. " We'll go to Maymyo instead of Bhamo for our camp. He'll never suspect us—a pair of ordinary hunters out for tigers, Pan Yi ! "

" Tigers ! Good, master—that is very good. Tha Zan is one bad tiger—one very bad panther. We must hunt well, master." And again the servant chuckled deeply in his chest with full appreciation of the joke. Then he questioned, " We go to-day ? "

" Yes, by the afternoon train to Maymyo, and we'll hire bearers to carry the outfit to the camp ground. So hustle along, Pan Yi. We can get our tents pitched to-night, and who knows but that before long we may bag the wildest panther in Burma ? "

## CHAPTER II

### IN THE POWER OF THA ZAN

DURING the first two days of the camp nothing happened of any special interest. The possible capture of dacoits was frequently discussed between Harwood and his Burmese servant. The tent had been pitched in the heart of the jungle, about two miles from the village of Shwe Nan, in the hope of getting some information about Tha Zan. But, although Pan Yi had made a visit to the village on the pretence of buying eggs and fruit, his careful inquiries failed to obtain the slightest information concerning the outlaw.

That did not surprise the hunters. Certain villages in Burma are well known to be friendly to dacoits, and some even make a business of getting information concerning persons worth robbing—and, of course, the villagers are not unrewarded for their help.

On the third morning, however, while Pan Yi was preparing breakfast and Bob employed in cleaning a gun, a visitor came to the camp. He was, to all outward appearances, a Buddhist monk. As there are thousands of wandering monks all over Burma, the visit of one such was not a matter for surprise. The shaven head and the orange robe are common sights even in the most isolated districts.

But there was something unpleasant about this visitor. Bob felt it even as he looked up from his occupation and saw the monk slowly approaching him from the jungle with downcast eyes and begging

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bowl held forward in his right hand. And when he came close to the tent the boy could not help shuddering as one shudders at the approach of some loathsome reptile. But he tried to control his feelings, and spoke the usual greeting : "A happy day be to you, *poongi* (monk)," he said in Burmese.

The monk did not reply. These begging brothers do not speak at such times. They neither ask for charity, on which they live, nor do they give thanks for what they receive. He simply approached nearer ; and if Bob had shuddered at a distant view, his unpleasant feelings were in no wise diminished as the man came close enough for a fuller view.

'Surely a more repulsive face could not be imagined. The face was large, with eyes shaded by heavy dark brows, while a scar on the left cheek drew the mouth sideways into a leer that seemed hardly human. The lower jaw was of a massive bulldog type, and indeed the whole expression was more that of an animal than a man. Only one glimpse of the eyes did Harwood obtain. That was when the monk gave a swift glance at the lad. But that one glimpse was sufficient. To Bob it seemed that he had looked into the eyes of a panther—flashing with the fire of cruelty such as one seldom sees but in the eyes of a jungle monster.

Harwood rose quickly and called to his servant.

"Pan Yi ! Give this *poongi* some curry and rice for his bowl."

The servant immediately obeyed the order, whereupon the monk turned and strode proudly back into the jungle. Pan Yi watched the departing figure until it was hidden in the bamboo scrub, then he ran to Bob's side, and exclaimed in an excited undertone :

"The dacoit—Tha Zan! It is he, master!"

At this announcement Harwood fairly gasped with astonishment. "Tha Zan?" he repeated, as though he could hardly believe what the servant told him. "Are you sure?"

"Very sure, master," replied the Burman. "I saw him but once—it was in the night—in the street, when he escaped from the police after burning a house. By the light I saw his face. I do not forget it—evil, bad—very bad face."

"But this was a *poongi*," persisted the boy, as though he were reluctant to accept any statement that allowed room for doubt.

Pan Yi spat contemptuously in the direction that the late visitor had taken, and then responded:

"*Poongi!* May the Lord Gaudama punish him for his evil ways! That was no *poongi*, but Tha Zan—the Tiger-Man."

This was too much for Harwood's patience. He rose smartly from the upturned case upon which he had been sitting, and faced the Burman with angry impatience.

"Oh, you fool, Pan Yi! Tha Zan—and we let him go! Why did you not tell me—why did you not give a sign? A gun in my hands, and cartridges at my side—that man would have been mine!"

Pan Yi received the boy's reproach without a sign of resentment or anger, and then answered quietly:

"The right hand held the begging bowl, but—the left hand was covered by the robe. There was a revolver in the left hand, master. It was pointed—at you. What could I do?"

Harwood was stunned. He realized the truth of

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what his servant had told him, and he also realized how near he had been to death. Well for him that he had not suspected the identity of the sham monk, for certainly he would have acted upon impulse and tried to make the capture for which he had been living for years. That moment would have been his last. All the same, it was galling to know that he had been so successfully fooled, and that last thought was enough to stir him to immediate action.

"See here, Pan Yi. There is no time to be lost. I must get on the fellow's tracks at once. If he escapes me now, I may never have such a chance again."

"Master will take care——" the Burman began, with natural anxiety for the safety of the lad.

Bob laughed airily. "Have no fear," he said. "I'll be careful enough. You know that when I shoot with a revolver I never miss. It is easier to shoot the beast you are hunting than to defend when one is hunted. Oh, I'll be careful enough. You can make the camp fire safe and hide the guns and things. Then you can follow. Be as quick as you can, for we can't afford to lose any time. Tha Zan must be taken before he reaches his gang."

Harwood was already starting to put his intentions into action, but the Burman stopped him with a sudden grip on the arm.

"No, master," said the servant solemnly. "It is not good that you go alone. How could I ever face the Commissioner Sahib if any evil came to you?"

Bob turned to look kindly upon the Burman, whose devotion he could not help appreciating.

"That's all right, Pan Yi," he said gently. "You

are a good sort, and I know that you would do anything for me——”

“I would die—gladly—for master,” was the quiet interruption, to which Bob returned quickly:

“I know, Pan Yi. But you need not be afraid. There is no chance of either of us dying this time. I feel sure that Tha Zan is doomed to fall into our hands to-day. So hurry up, and follow me. Then we’ll both share the glory of the capture.”

The Burman obediently stood aside, and immediately Harwood started on the run for that side of the camp where the dacoit had been seen to disappear.

The jungle in that district was very dense. Thick growths of bamboo made any straight progress an impossibility, and so the boy was obliged to take a winding path, and trust to good fortune to lead him in the tracks of the dacoit. At a short distance he came upon a faint path—evidently an old course taken by deer or other inhabitants of the jungle to some regular waterhole. A close examination revealed the recent disturbance of some dry leaves and twigs and the imprint of a sandal—cheering signs that his instinct had not been mistaken. Once or twice he heard the sound of birds twittering a little distance ahead, and he was bushman enough to distinguish between the sound of birds at peace and the alarm signal by which they inform their friends of danger. These were alarm calls, and thus encouraged the boy pressed onward, peering in every direction for a glimpse of the yellow robe.

Then, sooner than he had dared to hope—just as he passed through a thick tangle of creepers to a small clearing—his errand was rewarded. Standing at

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the farther side of the grass patch, with his back towards the pursuer, as though pausing for a moment's meditation, the false monk was seen. Bob's heart leapt with excitement, but he was too good a hunter to allow his nerves to get the better of him at an emergency—no matter how sudden. Instantly he drew his revolver, took steady aim, and then called firmly in Burmese :

“ Stand still, Tha Zan ! Don't move ! I'll shoot you like a dog if you move an arm.”

There was not a quiver of the yellow robe. Not a muscle moved. But a hoarse laugh greeted the order, and a jeering voice replied :

“ When Tha Zan is dead, then he will be at the mercy of—the son of Harwood ! But—that day is not—now.”

The words were barely spoken before Harwood suddenly found himself in the grip of many powerful hands, which seemed to have come by magic from the bush behind him. The revolver was struck from his hold by a vicious blow from a club. Only a confused glimpse was the boy able to get of his attackers in the wild struggle that followed. But he was readily overpowered and thrown violently face downwards upon the ground. Then a cloth was wrapped round his head, and cords pulled tightly round his body. Again he heard the hoarse laughter of the dacoit sounding above the deep growls of the men into whose hands he had fallen. Then he felt himself picked up and carried forward—whether he had no means of knowing.

It seemed like miles—for hours—the journey that followed. The boy tried to struggle, but it was a

## In the Power of Tha Zan 21

vain attempt in the powerful arms that held him, and the cords that bound him so cruelly that they cut into his flesh at each movement. But at last there came a pause. The prisoner was roughly set upon his feet, and the covering removed from his head.

## CHAPTER III

### PAN YI LAUGHS

THE sudden change from darkness to light dazzled the boy, but when, at last he was able to see clearly, he found that he was still in the depths of the jungle. Evidently the spot chosen for the pause had been a recent camp, for a fire still burned brightly at his side, and several horses were tied to the trees near at hand.

As for his captors—a more villainous-looking crowd of a dozen men or so it would be impossible to imagine. They were all Burmans, half naked, and, for the most part, armed with *dahs* (long knives) stuck behind in their belts. Bob's benumbed limbs were hardly able to support him, so two of the men held him upright to face the sham *poongi* who was sitting on a fallen log, glaring at him with an evil grin of triumph on his revolting face.

"So we meet at last?" said the dacoit with a sneer. "I have heard of you, son of Harwood. For a long time you have wished to meet Tha Zan, the dacoit. Is it not so?"

"I have vowed to shoot you like the dog that you are," retorted Harwood stoutly. But the robber only laughed as at the boasting of a child.

"When a hunter seeks his prey in the jungle he does not sing until the gun is fired, lest the tiger hear his coming, and be ready to meet him," said Tha Zan meaningly. Then he added: "There are ears in the compound of the Commissioner Sahib; there are also



"SO WE MEET AT LAST!"



tongues that carry what is heard. Your visit was expected. Well, do you like Tha Zan now that you see him? Is he not pretty?"

"As pretty as a pig—as brave as an ant," exclaimed Harwood.

But the dacoit only laughed again, saying: "Be not angry, English boy. You shall not see your friends again, but they will not forget you. To-night the Commissioner Sahib will receive a gift from you—your skin! It will be a pretty joke that he will understand—coming from Tha Zan, who never forgets an enemy!"

The last words were uttered with all the venom of which the speaker was capable, and the threat was greeted with a growl of approval from the other Burmans. Harwood felt his blood run cold. He knew that the dacoit had spoken no idle threat merely to excite fear. He knew that what that man promised he would most assuredly carry out, especially if it were something brutal. But the boy did his best to hide his horror, and forced himself to smile as he replied to the bully:

"That is the sort of work that would please you, Tha Zan—having many men to help you. Did I not say truth when I said that you were as brave as an ant?"

At this jibe a change suddenly came over the Burman. He swiftly dropped his manner of cruel pleasantry, rose quickly, and gave two or three short orders to his men in an undertone. Then he turned again upon the boy.

"You seem to understand well the ways of ants," he said. "Well, if they are your friends, you shall

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enjoy their company." Then to his men : "Get to your work, brothers ! Time is short, for we have other things to do before night."

Immediately obeying the orders of their chief, two of the Burmans drew their *dahs* and quickly made four long pegs from the loose wood at hand. These were hastily driven into the ground at the four corners of an imaginary square. Other men removed the cords from Bob's body, roughly tore most of his clothes from him, and before he had time to realize the fate that was in store for him he was lying on his back upon the ground, with his hands and ankles firmly tied to the four stakes.

Then another man brought an earthen vessel containing sugar which he sprinkled sparingly on the boy's body, and in a thin line to a neighbouring ant-hill ; and when all preparations were completed the men fell back to a little distance, while Tha Zan approached and gave the boy a slight kick.

"Tha Zan is always glad to receive visitors in the jungle," said the Burman. "When that visitor is the whelp of an Englishman he is very happy indeed. So he gives you a comfortable bed, and you will soon have visitors—very many visitors." Then the speaker bent down and hissed in the boy's ear : "Who is as brave as an ant now ?"

Weak though he was with the strain, these words were just those which were necessary to recall Bob's courage.

"When you hear me cry out, Tha Zan, then you will know that you have met a dog as cowardly as yourself !" the boy retorted.

At these words the dacoit's right hand darted

behind him, and a shimmering *dah* flashed in the air. Bob involuntarily shut his eyes to receive the blow which he felt would certainly fall upon him. But next instant the *dah* was lowered harmlessly.

"Death from the blade is too good for such carrion," snarled Tha Zan to his comrades. "Let us rest a while, and amuse ourselves by watching the friendly ants at their work." And the dacoit retired to his previous seat upon the fallen tree.

For some time Harwood lay there, feeling only the discomforts of the sweltering sun that poured upon him and the pain of the thongs that bound him to the stakes. Only his head was free to move, and he turned his face to one side so as to avoid somewhat of the glare from overhead, which touched him with furnace heat.

But, painful as were the effects of the sun and the cords, Bob could only in part imagine how trebly torturing would be the ordeal awaiting him when the ants found their path along the sugar track and reached his helpless body. At such time, he knew, they would swarm upon him in their thousands. By minute degrees he would be devoured, until a long-postponed death put a merciful end to his torments. Some day a traveller might find his bare bones as a sole record of the deed.

Such thoughts as these were passing through the boy's mind as he lay prepared for the penalty of seeking the dacoit chief. At last he fell into a sort of stupor; but oblivion was not yet to be his friend, for he was roused by feeling something moving on his chest. Yes, the first black enemy had found him! The scout would quickly call his kind, and then the torture would commence in all its terrible earnest. The eyes

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of the watching Burmans were keen. They had also seen the ant scout, and a low laugh of satisfaction came from their throats.

"The fun will be soon now," remarked one. "It will be a good *pwe* (circus) for us," said another. And then Tha Zan exclaimed with fiendish delight : "See ! He is calling his brothers ! "

Harwood stared towards the ant-hill, and soon he saw a thin dark line of moving specks of black beginning to stretch towards him from the ant-hill like a growing ribbon. With horrified fascination he watched it. Nearer and nearer it advanced, while it became blacker as reinforcements issued from the ground. Now it was only a couple of yards away—now a foot—six inches—three—one—

"Halt ! Right turn ! Fix bay-o-nets ! "

These three orders rang out with quick precision from the jungle near at hand. With a cry of dismay the dacoits sprang up and ran for their horses. Tha Zan was as quick as any of his gang, but as he ran he scattered the camp fire with his foot so as to set fire immediately to the surrounding dry grass, and thus cover his retreat.

"Ad—vance !" came the next military order.

The dacoits had vanished when into the clearing from the thick jungle came—Pan Yi—alone !

"Oh, master ! master !" cried the servant as he swiftly cut the binding cords with his *dah*. But the strain had been more than the boy could stand, and he was unconscious of the aid that had come to him. The big Burman was wiser than to waste time then in sympathy, or even in trying to restore his young master. He knew that at any moment the dacoits

might discover that a trick had been played on them. So he picked up the helpless boy in his strong arms and fled with him back into the jungle.

And that night, when Bob was lying, fairly comfortable, in his tent—his wounded limbs having been bound and doctored by the great hands that could be as tender as a woman's—then Pan Yi felt that he had a right to laugh again, and he made the bamboos ring with a loud guffaw.

"Many times have I watched the soldiers on the ground of parade," he said, "and many times have I longed to be a British officer and shout 'Halt! Right turn!' But never was I so proud as to-day when I led the soldiers—that were not there. Oh, it was great fun, master! It was splendid *pwe*."

"It was nearly the end of all fun for me, Pan Yi," returned Bob with a weak smile. "I shall never forget what you did for me; but—you and I have got to catch Tha Zan yet. And we'll do it, too, one of these days."

## CHAPTER IV

### A CLOAKED VISITOR

ON the day following Bob Harwood's narrow escape from tortured death at the hands of Tha Zan the dacoit, the boy decided that it would be well to change his camp to another part of the jungle. Pan Yi, the devoted Burmese servant, eagerly agreed to the proposal. He had spent a wakeful night anticipating that the Tiger-Man, with his band of murderers, would surely fall upon the little camp under cover of the darkness.

"Tha Zan ever hunts his prey like the beasts of the jungle, who must be his relations," Pan Yi had said while serving breakfast that morning. "When he has smelt blood, he will follow until he has torn down the victim."

Bob laughed at the Burman's evil foreboding.

"It seems to be a case of double-tracking, Pan Yi," he said. "I am on the track of Tha Zan, and he is on the track of me! One of these days we'll meet under fair conditions, and then—won't there be an unholy scrum!"

Pan Yi did not seem to receive the prospect with the full enthusiasm that Harwood expected. He listened to his young master with respect, but the serious expression on his face suggested that he did not consider the present situation as being altogether satisfactory.

"Would it not be good, master," he remarked hesitatingly, as he replenished Bob's cup with fragrant

coffee—"would it not be as the Captain Sahib in Mandalay wishes, that we go back to Mandalay? The Captain Sahib would send many police with guns to find the Tiger-Man."

At this suggestion, Bob frowned, and returned rather roughly :

" If you are afraid, Pan Yi, you are welcome to go back to Captain Forrester at once, and tell him how I have gone out to hunt Tha Zan—alone. My guardian will be angry—oh, yes, he'll be very angry, and say many strange words, perhaps. But he will understand. He knows that I have vowed for years to avenge my father's murder. And he knows me well enough to understand that, once on the track, I'll carry on if I have to spend the rest of my life in the jungle."

While he spoke, the boy observed a smile gradually spreading over the Burman's large face. It was a smile that threatened to disturb every feature until the last speck of seriousness had disappeared.

" What's the matter, Pan Yi? " Bob asked sharply. " I don't see anything funny in what I have said, and I don't see anything to laugh at in the thought that you want to skip out and leave me to carry on alone."

The servant quietly replaced the full cup on the upturned case that served as a table. Then he answered without any effort to repress the smile.

" That is the reason why I laugh, master—at the saying that Pan Yi would leave his young master alone. That would be very much to laugh at—for it is not possible. But I know that the Captain Sahib would wish me to speak, for the answer is good. It would have been a very unhappy day for me, master,

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if you had said, ‘ Right, Pan Yi. Pack up, and let us go to Mandalay at once ! ’ It is right to give good advice, but it is not always nice to have good advice taken. Besides ”—the Burman paused to chuckle for a moment to himself—“ even if you had taken the very good advice, and gone back to the Commissioner Sahib, Pan Yi would have stayed to take the Tiger-Man alone ! ”

At these words, Bob uttered a cry of delight and sprang up to grip one of the servant’s massive hands.

“ You are a brick, Pan Yi ! ” he exclaimed. “ You are a whole cartload of bricks ! But we’ll stick together, you and I, until the Tiger-Man is trapped or dead——”

“ Or until he has made both of us dead,” completed the Burman. “ That was the meaning of my words, master.”

So the camp was moved that morning. A thicker part of the jungle was selected on the farther side of Shwe Nan village, where Tha Zan was known to have so many friends. Of course, Bob was well aware that it would not be possible to conceal his camp for any length of time. It would be a simple matter for dacoits to track him to his lair. At the same time, the previous location was not one that presented good opportunities for defence, if the need arose. A better position would be close to the Shwe Nan River. The dacoits would not be likely to make any attack from the water, and so the river would leave an open way of escape, if a retreat were found to be a necessity.

For three days, however, nothing occurred to disturb the peace of the camp. During most of the time Bob was scouring the bush in the hope of locating the

hiding-place of the terrible dacoit. But his best efforts were only rewarded with failure. On the fourth day he determined to go somewhat farther afield than before, and it was dusk before he returned to the camp rather disheartened after another unsuccessful effort.

Pan Yi had been left to look after the camp, but when the boy reached the tent he found that the servant was absent. At first this did not surprise him. The Burman might have gone to visit the traps that had been set for wild fowl, for shooting had been given up for the time being, as it had not seemed to be wise to draw unnecessary attention to the camp. But as the night fell, and still there were no signs of Pan Yi's return, Harwood began to have reasonable fears that some evil had befallen the Burman during his absence.

Restless, but unable to take any action through ignorance of the cause of his servant's disappearance, Bob was obliged to prepare an evening meal himself, while every moment hoping that Pan Yi would put in an appearance and end the anxiety that his absence had caused. But as the night deepened and the moon began to creep upwards, the boy found himself sitting by the camp fire impatiently trying to come to some decision as to how he could go to the help of his faithful servant—for now he had no doubts but that the man must have fallen into the hands of their common enemy.

Then it was that Bob heard a slight rustling in the bush beyond. He instantly snatched a revolver from his belt and bent forward to peer into the darkness. A shapeless figure appeared moving close to the

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ground. At first Bob thought that it was a jungle animal, but after a few moments he discerned that it was the form of a human being completely covered with a dark mantle. Immediately suspecting another trick on the part of Tha Zan, the boy quickly aimed his weapon, at the same time calling out in Burmese :

“ Stop ! Whoever you are, stop, and show your hands ! ”

Instantly obedient to the order, the mysterious figure halted, and held forward bare arms and empty hands. But the head was still covered by the dark sheet, so Bob’s next order was that the stranger’s face should be turned to the light of the camp fire. This time the order was not obeyed, but a quiet voice spoke :

“ Pardon the disobedience of your servant, O my master. It is not good to look upon my face. Let me come nearer and speak. It is a friend who comes, and he has words to say that master will be glad to hear.”

“ Very well,” answered Harwood, but without removing the aim of his revolver. “ You may come. But hide not your hands for a moment or I will at once shoot. If you are Tha Zan, you shall not trick me a second time. Come ! ”

“ I—Tha Zan—that panther ! ” was the exclamation that came from the stranger’s hidden lips in a voice that vibrated with deep feeling. “ Sooner would I be called a village dog than bear such a name, even in jest. Shoot me rather than call me thus again.”

“ Then you are not—one of his men ? ” questioned Harwood cautiously, as the cloaked figure approached and crouched humbly by the fire.

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"My master cannot have heard the name of U Lauk and ask such question," was the answer.

"We meet strange creatures in the jungle," was the boy's uncomplimentary rejoinder. "Besides, I have not yet seen your face, nor (as you say) have I heard the name of U Lauk before. Who is he? Tell me your business quickly; then I will be able to judge better of you and your friends."

## CHAPTER V

### TIGER'S CLAWS

A SHORT silence followed Bob's last words, after which the stranger resumed, quietly, as before :

" Your servant—Pan Yi—he is not here ? "

Harwood started slightly at the unexpected question, but managed to reply, in fairly even tones :

" Pan Yi ? No, he is not here just now. He has—gone for a time, but—no doubt he'll soon be back."

" If he—ever—comes—back ! " returned the stranger, in ominous tones.

Bob sprang to his feet as though he had been disturbed by a sudden thunder-clap.

" Never ! " he exclaimed. " Why—what do you mean ? Who are you ? What do you mean ? Speak—and speak quickly, or it may be the worse for you ! "

But the mysterious visitor evidenced no surprise at the boy's angry manner and voice. (It is part of the Burmese habit to regard anger as equal to sin.) He merely proceeded to give the required information in the previous quiet tones that had characterized most of his earlier words.

" To-day, when Pan Yi was bent over the water to fill the tin, dacoits fell upon him. He fought—oh, he fought as a tiger might have fought to save her young—and he threw big men from him as easily as a child throws a ball. But dacoits were too many. With clubs they beat him, and with ropes they bound him, and then carried him away."

" And where is he now ? "

" Within reach of the claws of Tha Zan."

" Alive ? "

The stranger slowly shook his head.

" Whether or not he still lives I know not. But he was alive when they carried him away. I followed, unseen, as they bore him, often struggling."

" Then you saw where they took him ? " questioned Bob with impatient anxiety, and the man replied :

" I followed—to the old Wah Doon pagoda. There lives, as my master knows, the Serpent Slave of the Lord Buddha."

" The Serpent Slave ? " gasped the boy in wonder. The words in themselves conveyed no meaning to him, though the tone of the speaker's voice betrayed a knowledge of some horror familiar to Burmese people. " The Serpent Slave ? " the boy repeated. " Tell me what you mean ! Tell me to what fiendish torture that black-hearted man has delivered my poor servant ! "

" There," resumed the Burman, " in the inner chamber of the ruined monastery, alone with the golden Lord Buddha for countless years has the giant serpent had a dwelling, fed by the *poongis* of Shwe Nan. He protects the Lord Buddha from strangers. And in this chamber, Tha Zan said, Pan Yi would be placed."

With a swift movement the Burman stood upright while he spoke, and a rapid movement of his hands swept back the drapery that had hitherto concealed his head, after which he turned so that the firelight lit up every detail of his face.

Face ? Oh, the horror and the pity of the revela-

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tion ! When Bob looked, he only too bitterly regretted the consequences of his demand, for it seemed that he was looking upon something that had nothing human about it—nothing that any man could ever conceive as being associated with human features. At some distant time, it appeared, the Burman's face had been fiendishly mutilated.

"Heavens !" exclaimed Bob at the repulsive sight.  
"What is it ? How did you become like that ? "

The Burman quickly drew the cloak across his face again as he replied :

"That was the pay I received from the Tiger-Man these many years ago. I dared to defend my wife and children from his claws. Better had it been that he had killed me, as he killed them, except that he left me my life so that I could find revenge. Now, master, do you think that I can be a spy in the pay of that dacoit ? Would I not rather see the *dah* at his throat, and the rats gnawing his flesh ? "

"Lead on. I will follow," answered Bob firmly.  
"If anyone will guide me to the destruction of Tha Zan, you are that man."

## CHAPTER VI

### COILS OF DEATH

LED by the hapless U Lauk, Harwood was soon pressing his way through the dense jungle—his heart throbbing with anxiety to be at the side of the unfortunate Pan Yi. Would he be in time to save him? Or would he only arrive in time to find that the fiendish designs of Tha Zan and his band of dacoits had had their way? Such were the conflicting thoughts that occupied his mind until he felt that he would soon be almost distracted if he did not speedily learn the worst.

A full moon was shining overhead, but so thick was the growth of the trees that it was only occasionally that the rays of light were able to penetrate far enough to show a pathway through the dense undergrowth. But U Lauk seemed to know every inch of the way, and he threaded a twining path with the unerring instinct of one of the jungle animals themselves.

Not a word passed between the boy and his guide until they came to a rapid stream which could only be crossed by jumping on the few stepping-stones which Nature had provided. Here the Burman paused to warn Bob that the water was not only swift but also deep, and care must needs be exercised that each foothold was secure.

"Is it much farther?" the boy then asked.

"Not far," was the answer. "But we must travel slower, master. We must have strength for the work before us."

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This suggestion was far from being acceptable to the impatient lad, but as he had to depend upon the Burman's guidance he had perforce to accept the conditions, distasteful though they were.

"If I knew the way alone, nothing would slacken my speed until I reached Pan Yi's side," he said. Then he added : "I only hope that Tha Zan has not become impatient, and hastened the end with his own hand."

But U Lauk quickly dismissed that distressing thought.

"Tha Zan will not slay you, or anyone belonging to you, with the knife," was the man's comment.

"The *poongis* are his protectors, and they are his eyes for seeing chances for good dacoity. They have forbidden him to spill men's blood. Had it not been so your wheel of fate would have ceased to roll four days ago. Yes, master, I know the story of that day ! Did I not say that the jungle has ears and tongues ? "

"Then there are some men whom Tha Zan fears ? "

The Burman laughed at the question. "The yellow-robed monks are many, and Tha Zan's friends are few. If these *poongis* ordered his death he would cease to breathe before an hour had passed. But let us journey on, master. Wait on each piece of rock before leaping for the next. There will be no return from these dark waters."

At last, through the trees, could be seen the outline of extensive buildings, now, for the most part, in ruins, though from the centre rose the fairly well-preserved tapering peak of a pagoda. On advancing carefully, the glow of a smouldering camp fire could

be seen at one side of the ruins, and the bright moon-light also revealed the dark outlines of several figures grouped around.

"There rest the Tiger-Man and his brothers," explained U Lauk, pointing in the direction of the camp. Then he indicated the tower of the pagoda, saying: "Underneath there dwell the golden Lord Buddha and the Serpent Slave. We will creep round to the back, master. If we keep in the shadow we will be safe."

As noiseless as a couple of panthers the boy and his companion skirted the jungle until they reached a spot behind the ruined buildings, and directly on the side opposite from the dacoits' encampment. Here they felt themselves to be comparatively secure. But, even then, the Burman would not permit any increase of speed or relaxing of caution.

And well was it that the guide was so obstinate, for before the boy was aware of any danger being at hand he saw U Lauk suddenly spring forward, while next moment the Burman was kneeling on the ground with the half-naked figure of a man beneath him. Bob hastened to give his companion assistance. But U Lauk held up his hand to warn silence, and to intimate that help was not needed.

"A watchman. One of Tha Zan's men," he whispered, and Bob asked under his breath:

"Have you killed him?"

"No," was the answer. "But he will know nothing for an hour. That grip on the neck—it was taught me by the *poongis*. It can kill, but it can be used to make a long sleep. That man will just sleep! Now let us seek Pan Yi."

A few more steps and the shelter of the fallen masonry was reached. Most of the outer brick walls were a mass of crumbling ruins, and were quite sufficient to afford concealment to anyone desiring to hide his movements. Then the rescuers hastened to the front of the inner pagoda, but there they were met with disappointment, for the massive doors were shut and locked. This, the inner chamber of the whole monastery, had been all that the monks had cared to preserve. But it takes more than closed doors to daunt such persons on such an errand as that of Harwood and his guide.

There were many windows. True, they were all some distance from the ground, but the crumbling walls adjacent were adequate means for the need of these earnest adventurers. Heedless of appearances now, the man threw off his cloak, and led the way to one of the larger openings. The foothold was insecure, but care was rewarded, and before long the boy and man had gained the ledge of the window, and were able to look down into the chamber, which was lit by the moon as clearly as though illumined by a thousand lamps.

Pan Yi ?

Yes ; he was there, but—in what a plight !

A huge figure of the Buddha, in the usual cross-legged position, occupied one side of the chamber. Directly facing it stood the poor servant, but his wrists were tied together and his arms stretched to full length above him by a rope looped round his neck and attached to a beam above. True, he was free to move his lower limbs as he pleased, but his position was such that any weight put upon the rope would

mean death by strangling. Besides, there was another reason to keep him from struggling. That reason was a gigantic python, whose shining body was slowly slipping from the Buddha's legs towards the half-suspended figure.

So the Burman was motionless. Indeed, so little sign was there of even breathing, that he might have been almost assumed dead. But his eyes were full of life. They were staring fixedly, without so much as the flicker of an eyelid, at the serpent, which was slowly advancing towards him.

Up to the present Pan Yi had not discovered the vicinity of his friends. Nor would he have been likely to have made any sign of recognition even if he had known of their approach, for the python had its glittering eyes steadily directed to its prospective victim. The slightest movement on the part of the latter and the great coils of muscle would have flashed round the helpless body, and the devoted servant would have immediately passed into the Nirvana (paradise) of his faith.

Silently Bob drew his gun, but instantly U Lauk's firm grip was on his wrist, and he whispered : "No, master. Tha Zan would hear ; the serpent would strangle ; then we, too, would perish at the hands of many."

The boy replaced the weapon, but unsheathed his hunting knife. U Lauk nodded approval this time, but indicated that it would be too risky to descend into the pagoda while the python was so near to Pan Yi. Possibly the creature might presently move away, if it found that the Burman was motionless and thus, probably, dead. Snakes, like many other creatures

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of desert and jungle, will seldom eat that which they have not slain.

Bob found the waiting almost intolerable. Several times he was tempted to take a chance with the revolver, and he might have done so had not the wonderful patience of his companion shamed him to self-control. Also the marvellous self-restraint exhibited by Pan Yi was a lesson to the most foolhardy. Considering the strained position, Pan Yi was nearly performing a miracle. Indeed, a bronze statue could hardly have been more motionless or lifeless than that brave Burman as he waited in the face of death.

Nearer the python moved. It came slowly as the advancing minute hand of a clock. To the onlookers there could be no doubt as to the creature's purpose. That sluggish, gliding movement, with eyes steadily directed to the object before it, is the serpent's means for striking stunned fear into the heart of its victim. No sudden movement that might startle is permitted. To a dumb creature there would be hardly any appreciation of the nearness of the enemy, so stealthily would death creep upon it. But to the Burman this advance must have seemed like the speed of a race-horse.

Bob's temples were throbbing. Would U Lauk never give the signal for the rescue? He gripped the handle of his knife with a ferocity that numbed his fingers, and when at last the python's head reached Pan Yi's feet the boy felt as though he must cry out to relieve the agony of suspense.

Just at that critical moment he felt a slight movement at his side. U Lauk had moved both legs until

he was crouching on the window ledge, while his head was strained forward in an attitude suggestive of an animal scenting its prey.

Again Bob turned to look at his servant. The python had raised its head, and it was slightly swaying ere it commenced to twine the terrible coils around its victim's body.

The sight was more than the boy could bear. How could he permit the terrible creature to work its will without a single effort being made to prevent it? Whether his companion approved or not, Bob determined that he would dash to Pan Yi's aid. But at the same moment U Lauk also put his intentions into action. Not a sound did he utter. Hardly did he seem to take any care for his purpose, but just as though he had been propelled from a sling, the Burman suddenly sprang forward with outstretched arms and fingers ready to clutch—straight for the python's neck! Almost at the same instant Bob followed—how he never could describe.

A slash of the hunting knife and Pan Yi was free. Yes, Pan Yi was free; but what of U Lauk? As master and servant turned to look they saw the python at a little distance beyond. But the creature's body was coiled like a spring, and in the centre was the lifeless body of poor U Lauk—crushed to quivering pulp.

Pan Yi started forward with a cry of dismay, but Bob held him back.

"We can do no good now. We cannot save him now," the boy said. "Poor fellow! He has given his life for you, Pan Yi."

A choking sob came from the Burman's throat.

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"He was—my brother, master," he said. "He always hid from us, and now—he has died—for me!"

"Yes," said Bob with swift resolve. "But we shall not leave him thus—no, not though Tha Zan and all his dacoits should capture us, and send us to a like fate." And drawing his revolver the boy fired three shots straight into the python's gaping mouth.

A shout from the distance outside betokened that the firing had not passed without notice.

"Come, Pan Yi," said Harwood hastily. "We must escape into the jungle with all speed. It is not to-night that the Tiger-Man will fall into our hands. But his day is drawing to a close!"

"Tha Zan's night shall be long and terrible if my strength can make it so," added the Burman in deep tones burdened with bitterest hate and revenge.

Then the boy and his rescued servant sprang for one of the windows to seek the safety of the jungle, just as the sound was heard of a heavy key turning in the lock of the door behind them.

## CHAPTER VII

"I WIN!"

"MASTER, I have news for you!" said Pan Yi intensively, as he returned to camp one afternoon, and found Bob Harwood lying face downwards at full length upon the grass while he watched a keen duel that was taking place between a small black scorpion and a large tarantula spider.

The boy looked up at the sound of his servant's voice and remarked smilingly :

"Keep back, Pan Yi. Don't disturb them in their battle. The scorpion is myself, and the spider is Tha Zan, the Tiger-Man. Watch them! There is a bit of prophecy going on here. If the scorpion wins, then I shall win; but if the tarantula comes off best man, then the fates are going to be against us this trip."

The Burman smiled. All Burmese people are ever ready to enjoy a little game of chance. They are the greatest gamblers in the world, and so Pan Yi was not reluctant to postpone the telling of his news until the contest had been decided between the spider and his venomous little foe.

"The scorpion always slays the tarantula," the servant remarked, as he assumed the customary squatting pose, and Bob returned with a laugh :

"Let us hope that what you say is true. Perhaps this may be one of the times when he is beaten. Let us watch and see what luck is in store for us."

It was a duel worth watching, if it were only for

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the sake of studying the wonderful alertness of the creatures. The tarantula was a large one of its kind, and as it stood high poised upon its hairy legs, its two beads of eyes fired with anger, and its two forelegs moving nervously in the air with intent to grip the enemy with miniature lion claws as well as gaping mandibles—as it waited thus it was indeed a creature ferocious enough to strike terror into the heart of many a foe twice its size, far less a small scorpion.

But the scorpion was no less fearsome. Its two little lobster-like claws were open and quivering, and its tail with the thorn point terminating the poison-sack was arched forward over its head. And all the time the angry little creature continued running to and fro with evident anxiety to find an opportunity for coming to grips. But the tarantula hardly moved. It knew the terribly deadly nature of its enemy's sting, and refused to be "drawn" by any of the familiar tactics.

"The scorpion will win!" muttered the Burman deeply, and with suppressed excitement.

"The scorpion may lose," returned the boy, though in his heart he hoped to see the reverse of his words.

The decision was not long delayed. Once or twice the scorpion made a forward dash to confuse its enemy. On such occasions the tarantula successfully jumped aside, though not neglecting to chance a snap with its mandibles. But the scorpion was nimble. It scampered to safety before the eager jaws could reach it.

Then suddenly came a forward rush on the part of the little fighter. He had waited for his opportunity, and did not neglect to seize it. Just for a

second or two was seen a confused jumble of hairy legs and shell body. But it was only for a moment. Almost immediately afterwards the scorpion was seen to scamper off safely into the grass beyond. The tarantula had drawn its legs beneath it, and its body was quivering in the death-throes.

Bob looked up into the face of the Burman. "I win ! " he said.

Pan Yi rejoiced, with all the solemnity of his race, to whom superstition is a very real thing. " My master wins, and Tha Zan, the Tiger-Man, has fallen ! "

" Good ! " exclaimed Harwood briskly, as he sat up and put aside further thoughts of the recent scene. " Now, Pan Yi, I am ready to hear this news of yours. What is it ? "

" My master knows that I have a friend who lives but a little way from the village of Shwe Nan," the Burman began. " He is the friend who gets food for us from the bazaar. To-day I bought some curry stuff and fruit from him—the same which I have carried in that basket. And he told me that there is much bad talk in the market."

" About us ? About Tha Zan ? "

" About both," was the answer. " The Tiger-Man is very much angry that the Serpent Slave did not kill me in the pagoda, and he has said in the hearing of many ears that he will not rest till he has tortured us, and slain us both with his own hands."

Bob received this announcement with a shrug of his shoulders, and a laugh of derision.

" It's very kind of the Tiger-Man, and we are grateful to him for his attention. But I wonder how he would feel if things worked the other way round—

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if we turn out to be the scorpions and he the tarantula ? But what do his friends, the *poongis*, say ? The monks will not approve of the shedding of blood. Up to now, they have helped his dacoitry—telling him of travellers to rob, and helping him to hide from the police. If it had not been for the *poongis*, my guardian, Captain Forrester, would have had Tha Zan executed years ago."

"The *poongis* have taken back their shelter," was the servant's answer. "They will help him no more, since he thirsts for blood."

"And Tha Zan knows that ? "

"Tha Zan is a man of great evil ; he is the friend of many devils, and he defies even the chosen servants of the Lord Buddha. Thus is his doom now written. But he heeds not. He says in the bazaar : 'As I slew the father and mother, so, with my own hands, will I cut the head from the body of the son.' That is the Tiger-Man's answer to the *poongis*. He is very evil."

"He is, Pan Yi," Bob agreed. "Good Burmans don't go about chopping off people's heads, just for the fun of the thing, do they ? "

The Burman shook his head solemnly at the question, then remarked thoughtfully : "It will not be good to keep this camp here. It is easily found. Tha Zan may come with many men when we are not ready for him, and two of us can do little against many when we do not expect them."

"You are right," returned Harwood. "Tha Zan is not likely to send us a letter telling us when we may expect his visit. As you say, it will be best for us to hide our tent and cooking-pots."

" There is a cave nearby where they would be safe from the rain," the servant suggested. " Then will we sleep under the trees to-night, one place ; to-morrow, another place. We will make what the Commissioner Sahib calls a ' walking-camp.' "

" Just so," the boy readily agreed. " This is now a feud in deadly earnest, Pan Yi—I seeking the Tiger-Man, and the Tiger-Man seeking me. The one who wins will be the one who sees first and strikes first. We must not allow ourselves to be outwitted by a common dacoit. Yes, a ' walking-camp ' it shall be."

So immediately steps were taken to strike camp. With small packs, rifles, revolver, food in the form of biscuits and dried fruit, the two man-hunters set out before nightfall—both fully determined that this was the beginning of the end of the terrible dacoit's career.

## CHAPTER VIII

### HOT ON THE TRACK

THE first night passed without any incident of interest. The next day was occupied in keen scouting for tracks of the Tiger-Man, but without any reward. The third day was also passed in the same manner, and when night came Bob and the faithful Burman were thoroughly tired out, and they were glad to snatch a hasty meal and throw themselves down beneath the shelter of a banyan tree to find refreshment in the sleep which came without much coaxing.

It was a dark night, although it was nearly the time of full moon. But the rainy season was at hand, and the sky was filled with heavy clouds which only now and then allowed the light to look down to earth between the banks of shadows as they passed across the sky.

For some time sleep was undisturbed. Then Bob suddenly awoke. It was not a half-waking such as one often experiences when the mind is troubled, but it was that full consciousness of all surrounding for which the hunter is always ready. From heavy sleep, the next moment he is wide awake. And on this occasion Bob was not only awake, but he had that strange feeling that danger was at hand—that creepy sensation which we all know, suggesting that something terrible is near.

The boy's hand quickly slipped to his revolver. At the same moment he turned his head to look into the

gloomy jungle, and saw, within a few arms' lengths, the dark outline of a panther's head, where two eyes were directed towards him like two little lamps. They were not very kindly lamps either. They had evil in their very light.

Knowing that a panther will seldom attack that with which it has not to struggle to kill, Bob instantly checked a temptation to move or to call upon Pan Yi. He might have attempted the effect of his weapon, but the boy quickly assumed that the animal was in readiness for a leap, and that it would spring on the flash. Even though the bullet might fortunately find its right billet, Bob knew that jaws and claws would have their way before lead. So he was obliged to lie as still as possible, to wait events and trust that the panther would soon take an interest in something in another direction.

But the strain of waiting in one position for a considerable time was a tremendous effort of self-control, and Harwood was just beginning to think that he would have to take the risk of a shot after all when he heard a faint sound of something rustling in the bush a little beyond where the panther stood. The animal also heard the movement and turned its head sharply in the direction from which the sound proceeded. At the same time Bob heard a faint whisper from behind saying : "Move not, my master !" Pan Yi, true son of the jungle that he was, had also sensed the danger, and was fully alive to the position.

For a little while the two watchers listened. The panther, equally alert, raised its head and sniffed the air to catch the scent of the night-prowler. A twig

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snapped ; then followed silence as before, while the Burman ventured to whisper : " It is a man—not a hunting animal. Listen, master ! "

Presently the stealthy rustling was repeated, but apparently the wanderer, whoever he might be, was ignorant of any danger. He made no apparent effort to move unheard. His cautious movements were only due to the ordinary care that has to be taken at night in these parts to avoid treading on cobras or thorns. The sounds came nearer. There was now no reason to doubt but that they were caused by human feet, and they were approaching in a direct line to where the watchers lay, with the panther intervening.

At this juncture Pan Yi gripped Bob's arm as an obvious caution to continued silence. Just then the panther was seen to crouch. It was the warning cat-like poise preparatory to a spring, and at the same time Bob felt a rifle laid across his body to use him as a rest. Then followed a rattle of bamboo scrub being thrust aside. The panther stiffened its body for the spring, but, just as the animal left the ground, the rifle spoke. A roar of pain and anger came from the panther's throat, immediately answered by a cry of terror from the unseen person beyond.

" The panther has got him ! " cried Harwood, instantly jumping up, and gripping his rifle to follow on a hoped-for rescue. But as the boy plunged into the neighbouring thicket with Pan Yi at his heels, Bob stumbled against a human figure, and both fell to the ground.

The panther had missed its aim and dashed into the jungle beyond. But apparently the stranger

thought he had fallen into the hands of an enemy instead of a friend, for he immediately grappled the boy—a welcome for which Bob was not prepared, and which he was obliged to return with some show of strength. His rifle had slipped from his hands at the sudden encounter, but he quickly found that he was not equal to the strength of his antagonist.

Uttering a curse in Burmese, the man threw off his opponent as easily as an old dog might have thrown aside a playful puppy, and before Pan Yi could come to the aid of his master the stranger had jumped to his feet and rushed headlong into the bush.

But dark though the night was, it was not so dark that Pan Yi's trained eyes failed to note the outlines of the departing figure.

"Tha Zan! The Tiger-Man!" he cried shrilly.

"Tha Zan?" echoed Harwood in astonishment, hardly able to believe the words.

"Yes, it is he!" replied the servant. "He has been in our hands, and he has escaped! Quick, master! Follow, or we lose him!"

As the words were uttered Pan Yi plunged into the bush in pursuit of the disappearing figure, closely followed by Bob.

"Are you sure that it is he?" the boy questioned as soon as he had regained the Burman's side.

"Sure, master," was the vehement response while the man continued the chase. "I would know that son of jinns if I were blind. We will take him to-night! The Lord Buddha himself could not save him from our hands now."

Fevered with the excitement of the chase Harwood pressed on. Fortunately the fugitive had taken a

course where the undergrowth was rather scanty, otherwise he would have readily outwitted his pursuers. As it was, however, it was difficult enough for the hunters to keep him in view, and more than once they had to follow only by sound.

At one time Harwood thought that he might frighten the dacoit into surrender.

"Stop, Tha Zan!" he called. "I have you covered, and will shoot!"

But the Tiger-Man gave no heed to the summons. The boy's revolver tried its message, but it was a running shot that only succeeded in startling some sleepy birds into chattering resentment at the unwonted disturbance of their peace. Not a sound did the dacoit utter. He had nerves of steel. He also seemed to have the agility of his namesake tiger, for he cleared fallen trees and penetrated bamboo clumps with the ease of a wild animal.

On went the chase until was heard the sound of rushing water, telling the pursuers that they were nearing the cataract of the Shwe Nan River.

The sound was music to Bob's ears.

"We'll have him at the falls!" he exclaimed exultingly. "No one would dare to enter the river at this point. We'll have him at last!"

But Pan Yi did not prepare to cook his hare until he had trapped it.

"The devils are on the side of the Tiger-Man," he returned. "Even the black and swift waters. Ah, he has fallen!"

The last words were a cry of triumph, very different from the previous pessimistic comment, for just as he had been speaking Tha Zan was seen to stumble

while crossing a large prostrate teak tree and disappear from view on the farther side.

Instantly the Burman sprang forward, leaping like a deer. His great arms were stretched out before him with fingers outspread in their eagerness to grip the throat of the dacoit.

"Ah, Tha Zan, your hour has come at last!" he cried. "Come, master! The Tiger-Man is——"  
"Gone!"

It was an exclamation of uttermost dismay that came from the boy's throat, for, on reaching the massive tree, expecting to find their victim lying wounded, it was found that the object of the chase had completely disappeared from sight! Little had they reckoned with the cunning of the Tiger-Man, who knew every trick of the creatures of the jungle, among whom he had spent his evil youth, and from whom he had learned all the arts of eluding pursuit for life.

For even as Bob and the Burman stood for a few moments in panting wonder on the farther side of the tree, Tha Zan was but a few feet distant on the near side from which they had just come. A pretence of stumbling, a brief shelter under a bend of the trunk provided a breathing space. Then, while the hunters searched the scrub on one side, like a serpent Tha Zan was crawling along the shelter of the giant trunk on the other side towards the better cover of the farther bush.

"Well, of all the mysteries this beats the band!" was Bob's verdict, spoken in tones of bitter disappointment.

Pan Yi gave ready explanation: "Did I not say, master, that the very devils are at the call of the Tiger-Man?"

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Tha Zan was near enough at that moment to hear the comments upon himself, and he chuckled quietly as he commented mentally: "Devils! It would take a very simple one to throw ashes in the eyes of a rat like you, Pan Yi. Set a rabbit to catch a civet cat! The claws will yet be ready to tear out your eyes, O son of dirt." And the dacoit pursued his snake-like retreat.

Completely at a loss how to proceed next, Bob was almost inclined to admit defeat for that night, when the quick eyes of the Burman observed a slight movement of the reeds at the summit of the high bank of the river.

"See, master! Look!" the servant exclaimed, at the same time pointing across the clearing which the friendly moon was now lighting for their benefit.

The boy turned quickly to look in the direction indicated, and it was just at that time that Tha Zan, confident in having mystified his pursuers, carelessly exposed his figure to view. That moment of carelessness almost proved his undoing. It was only a glance that Bob obtained, but that was sufficient to fan his flickering zeal into a blaze. In a flash of time he had crossed the intervening distance. Now his hands could almost touch the dacoit's back. But the snapping of a twig gave warning.

Tha Zan gave a quick glance over his shoulder, and then, without a second's hesitation, he did that which Bob had previously declared impossible—he leaped from the high bank, straight into the deep and swiftly moving current.

## CHAPTER IX

### FALSE HOPES

BOB'S decision was as rapid as the dacoit's. The man so nearly within his reach—the vowed vengeance of the many years so close to attainment—these were not triumphs to be forsaken in a moment of weakness. Like an arrow from a bow he also sprang forward ; and now the chase was a desperate flight through dark waters.

“Master! Master! The tumbling river—the ‘hungry waters!’” cried Pan Yi frantically from the bank as he saw his beloved young master being carried swiftly towards what he believed must be certain destruction. These “hungry waters,” as the Burmese called the cataract, had swallowed many a boat and many a man into the never satisfied gullet of the whirlpool beneath the falls.

But Harwood was too intent upon his errand to heed the warning, even though he heard it. His thoughts were all given to the memory of those loved parents whose death he was bent upon revenging, and he determined that, cost what it might, Tha Zan should meet punishment at last, even though another life had to be given in the task. On he pressed.

Apparently the dacoit was not as much at home in the water as he was in the jungle, for he splashed forward with but little of the swimmer's art, having but one thought—to reach the farther side of the river. But Bob was a trained swimmer, who knew how to make the most speed with the least possible loss of

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energy. And so, helped by the current, he found that he was rapidly overtaking the dacoit.

At last, only a few yards separated them. A few more strong strokes and the Tiger-Man would be within reach. Bob turned on his left side to change his stroke, and it was lucky for him that he did so, for he was just in time to catch a glimpse of a great tree that was being carried directly towards him. Instantly the boy dived. Had he not done so he would have received a blow from the root of the tree that would have assuredly shattered his skull.

When he regained the surface that danger had certainly passed, but the delay, brief though it was, had considerably increased the distance between himself and Tha Zan, who had clutched one of the trailing branches of the same tree, and was clambering to comparative safety astride the floating trunk.

The roar of the cataract was now like constant thunder. That ought to have been sufficient to recall the boy to a sense of striving for his own safety. Under ordinary circumstances no doubt it would. But these were not ordinary circumstances.

Harwood was furious at the thought that even now the Tiger-Man might elude him. So again he put on the pace in pursuit. Desperation gave him renewed strength, and it was not long before he had made such headway that he, in his turn, had clutched a branch and was struggling to the insecure foundation, creeping towards his enemy who now sat holding grimly with both hands, while the tree, like a grotesque boat, was speeding straight for the falls.

Bob's first thought, on gaining a firm position, was a not unnatural one to empty his revolver into

the back of his enemy. But the Britisher's sense of fair play restrained him. He could not shoot even a demon from such a position of advantage. So he crept cautiously forward until Tha Zan was within arm's reach—all unconscious of vengeance so near. Then the boy suddenly bent forward, and flung an arm around the Burman's neck, at the same time exclaiming :

“ At last, Tha Zan ! At last I have you ! ”

Utterly taken aback by the unexpected assault, the Burman uttered a startled cry, and released his hold upon the tree so suddenly that he and his assailant nearly rolled off into the water. But villain though he was, no man could ever justly accuse the Burman of being a coward, and when it came to extremities his wits were not far from him. He instantly realized his position. He also realized that, after all, such a grip from behind had a very poor advantage. So he flung up his arms and locked them round Bob's neck, at the same time cursing hoarsely :

“ Does the whelp of a jackal think he can crush the throat of a tiger ? ”

“ At least we die together,” retorted Bob, endeavouring to gain some vantage of hold, though he realized speedily enough that the fates seemed certainly to be on the side of the Burman. Yes, it had been a reckless effort on the boy's part. What was his strength against that of the terror of the jungle ?

Tha Zan was in a position to exert enormous pressure. With his legs gripping the trunk of the tree he had a leverage sufficient to crack the boy's neck. To Harwood the strain was almost unbearable. He felt pains shooting through his temples like so many sharp

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knives, and each moment he thought that his spine must snap beneath the terrific pressure which the dacoit was able to bring to bear. What could he do? It was now no time for thinking of the niceties of fair play. Either his life or that of the Tiger-Man was the issue of the moment. He could not free himself from the grip. But one chance was remaining. With a sudden impulse he withdrew his right arm, clenched his fist, and sent it driving with a smashing blow upon Tha Zan's neck muscle.

The result of Bob's resort was instantaneous. The Tiger-Man's grip released. But just as one danger was averted another was imminent. The tree shuddered under a tremendous impact against a rock, and when the boy glanced ahead he saw that the tree was poised upon the very brink of the cataract, being held there by a projecting boulder end-on, while it slowly swung round with the current.

Apparently Tha Zan also sensed the extremity. He flung up his arms to grip blindly for any help, and once more clutched the boy. Then over they went, tree and mortals, still locked together and struggling —down, down, into the roaring depths of the hungry waters.

To Bob, it seemed that for hours there were gallons of water being poured into his lungs, while tons upon tons pressed him for miles into unknown depths of liquid. Still he was dimly conscious that he must not relax his grip upon the man, and he clung to him with the tenacity of a bulldog.

Then the boy seemed to lose all consciousness, except that he had a sort of sense of being flung high up into the air like a stone from a catapult. That

was when he came to the surface at the edge of the whirlpool after releasing his hold upon the Burman, whose weight was helping to bear him down.

It was then that Pan Yi found him, having hurried thither in the hope of effecting a rescue. And it was well that he had done so, for just as the boy came to the surface the Burman spied him and staggered waist-deep into the flood at the very moment when his young master was being sucked into the inner eddy of the ever-hungry pool.

Half drowned and more than dazed by the terrible experience Bob was dragged ashore, and when he regained glimmerings of time and place, his first question was :

“ The scorpion ? Has it—won ? ”

“ Even so,” was the Burman’s solemn answer. “ The hungry waters will never give up that food again ! ”

But Pan Yi’s confidence would have been less had he but imagined that the Tiger-Man was even then seated in a cave formed between the cataract and the cliff over which it tumbled. He was an exhausted man—perhaps he was even a slightly frightened man. But as he slowly recovered his strength he, on his part, was cheering himself with a reflection somewhat similar to that with which Pan Yi had just cheered his master. These were his unspoken words :

“ Truly the Lord Buddha cares for his own people. Tha Zan has not altogether broken his vow since he lured the English boy into the throat of hungry waters.”

The Tiger-Man’s day of doom had been postponed yet once again.

## CHAPTER X

### PREPARING THE TRAP

BOB HARWOOD was beginning to feel desperate. Only three more days of his holiday remained. At the end of that time he was pledged to return to Mandalay, to start work in a government office as planned by his guardian, Captain Forrester, the Commissioner of Police.

It was galling to think of it. The idea of having to go back to town without having gained the purpose for which he set out was enough to put any lad of spirit right into the doldrums. A "hunting camp," he had called it. But where was the "bag" that he had pledged himself to bring home? The Tiger-Man, they had discovered, was still at large, in spite of three fierce encounters. Was he to be left free to work more evil? Was the murderer of the boy's parents to be left unavenged?

"We know where he is camping," Bob said to his servant, Pan Yi. "He has become so bold 'that he makes little secret of his head-quarters. That is the worst of it—knowing where he is, and yet not able to capture him. If we could only manage to coax him away from his gang, then we would have a chance; but it would be madness to attempt to make him a prisoner while he has fifteen or twenty friends to help him."

Pan Yi listened respectfully to his young master's pardonable grumble. He was squatted on his heels in characteristic Burmese fashion while he smoked

a large cigar and gazed thoughtfully upwards to the tops of the trees, where noisy parrots were flying. But presently he turned his large, smiling face towards Harwood, who was stretched at full length upon the jungle grass, and remarked slowly :

" It is true what my master says. We know the camp of the Tiger-Man. I saw it myself yesterday. The business is quite easy. We can take him to-morrow."

" To-morrow ? " repeated the boy in surprise, at the same time raising himself upon one elbow the better to see his servant's face. " Why, what wonderful ideas have you got into your head this time, Pan Yi ? "

The Burman smoked thoughtfully for a few moments before replying to the question.

" The way is plain to me," he said at last. " Since the camp is known to us, I shall journey to Maymyo to-morrow—or to-night, if my master thinks best. There I shall send a message by the magic wires to the Commissioner Sahib, who will come very quickly and with many of his police having rifles. They will make a circle round the camp, and then the Tiger-Man will have his claws pulled out ! "

Pan Yi was apparently delighted with the simplicity of his plan, and he chuckled quietly with pleasure at his own cleverness. Certainly it was the plan that would have been adopted by any ordinary person under ordinary circumstances. But Bob was no ordinary person, and he did not think that the circumstances were ordinary either. Indeed, he received the proposal with disgust.

" Oh, Pan Yi, have you no more spirit than a dove after all ? " he questioned reproachfully. " Do you

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forget that I have sworn to take revenge with my own hands ? If it had been your father and mother whom the Tiger man had murdered—even though it happened years ago—would you be content to let other hands do that which your own ought to perform ? Tell me that ! ”

Again the Burman smoked a few deep draws before he allowed himself to speak.

“ I must always do my duty to the Captain Sahib, your very honoured guardian,” was his comment. “ It must be as I promised him. And I promised to give good advice as to your safety, my master. Is it not so ? ”

“ No doubt you said something of the sort,” Bob returned, whereupon the servant resumed :

“ Then it is my duty to say : ‘ Send for the police, and so end the days of the Tiger-Man and the days of all his brothers ! ’ . That is very good advice. Thus I have spoken, and no one can ever reproach me. But now”—here Pan Yi’s voice suddenly became firmer and more cheerful, and there was a humorous twinkle in his eye as well—“ now I say that I would end my days in shame if I were disgraced with a master who did not do his own manly work ! ”

Bob laughed heartily at the Burman’s last words.

“ You are a nice fellow to be put in charge of my safety ! ” he commented with mock reproach. “ What would the Commissioner Sahib say if he knew ? ”

“ When he sees us bringing Tha Zan in bonds,” said Pan Yi quietly, “ he will say : ‘ You jolly good fellow, Pan Yi. Your monthly wages will be raised two rupees more.’ But see ! Someone comes ! ”

As Pan Yi uttered the words of warning just

recorded he suddenly lowered the tones of his voice to those of crisp whispering, his eyes betraying swift alertness which was seldom absent for any length of time. But seemingly there was no real need for apprehension. Only two very harmless-looking strangers were approaching. One of these was an old man, apparently blind, the other was a Burmese lad of about Harwood's own age, and he was acting the part of guide to his rather feeble companion.

Both were dressed in shabby clothes, though they did not convey the impression of belonging to the beggar class. That they had travelled some distance was evident from the dust that rested on their clothes and bodies.

With the ready hospitality of the jungle, Bob immediately rose and gave the strangers welcome.

"Peace be with you, old man. You have journeyed far, I see. You are very welcome to my camp. Come and rest, while my servant prepares such refreshment as we can offer."

"My lord is kind," replied the old man, as he came forward and seated himself with his guide upon the ground in front of the tent. "My son and I have, indeed, journeyed far this day, and since early morning we have walked. We shall be glad to rest for a time. May your kindness to a blind man be counted to you as merit. Yesterday my home was burned and all my possessions destroyed. But I have relations living in the town of Maymyo. They are good Burmans, and will be glad to restore to me the little that I need so that my son and I may start our home and garden anew. So we journey thence to claim kindness in the Lord Buddha's name."

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" May you be rewarded for your trials," returned Bob in the Burmese form of speech ; but as he spoke he noticed that Pan Yi was beckoning to him from the door of the tent. Excusing himself, the boy crossed over to his servant's side, and found that individual in a state of ill-controlled excitement.

" What is the matter, Pan Yi ? " Harwood questioned, wondering what new inspiration had got into the man's mind.

" Oh, my master ! The Lord Buddha has helped us again ! " was the Burman's astonishing response.

Bob was obviously in a maze.

" Why, what on earth do you mean ? " he questioned. " You are not imagining that we have fallen into another trap, are you—that the old blind man is Tha Zan in disguise, while that innocent-looking boy is another of the bloodthirsty gang ? "

" No, no ! " whispered Pan Yi in agitation. " But the boy—look at him, master ! Look at him ! "

Bob obeyed the directing, but soon turned again to his servant as much puzzled as before.

" I see nothing about the fellow to make a fuss about. He is just an ordinary Burman of the jungle," was the verdict, whereupon Pan Yi thrust a small hand mirror into Harwood's hands, saying : " Look once more upon him, and then look on this ! "

Thoroughly puzzled to understand the man's purpose, Bob, nevertheless, proceeded calmly to follow the instructions, but he had no sooner glanced into the mirror at his own reflection than he nearly dropped the glass with astonishment as he exclaimed :

" Why, we might be twins, that boy and I ! We are as much alike as two peas ! "

" My master has wonderful seeing power," rejoined the servant, without any intention of being sarcastic. " If my master's hair were clipped, and his body rubbed all over with yellow clay, and the clothes of that boy, who could say which is the blind man's guide? The Lord Buddha himself would not know the difference. As for the Tiger-Man——"

" I see!" interrupted Harwood with glee, as the Burman's idea flashed upon him. " You mean that, as a Burmese boy, I might enter Tha Zan's camp with safety——"

" Not with safety, but perhaps with luck," interpolated Pan Yi. " As a blind man's guide you might draw him away to where I would await with a good rifle—perhaps at the golden Buddha. That is the light that came to me as I looked upon that boy's face and you, master. We must give thought to this. It will cost us many rupees to bribe the old man and to give him courage, but—we have only three more days!"

" Only three more days," repeated Bob thoughtfully. " Yes, Pan Yi, it is a good plan, if it can be worked. Let us return to our guests and see if they are Burmans of courage."

## CHAPTER XI

### THE TIGER'S LAIR

WHILE the foregoing events were taking place in one part of the jungle, within a march of only two or three miles, Tha Zan was brooding like his namesake tiger in one of its worst moods. Since the adventure in the hungry waters, but a few days since, his temper had been—well—tropical, to say the least of it. And he had ample reason for despondency as well as anger.

That he had failed to defeat the English boy was enough in itself to throw him into a brooding passion; but when he overheard a group of his followers laughing at their leader's failure to outwit a mere boy, his sulkiness was roused to a glowing fury that was ready to vent itself at the slightest opportunity. He felt like a fallen idol. So long as success had followed his earlier evil exploits men had been ready enough to praise him. But recent failures had smudged his glory. He was no longer the Tiger-Man who never failed to bring down his prey, and he could not but know that his gang were regarding him now with sneers.

These were matters that occupied him as he sat one morning apart from his old companions, meditating how he could recover his once proud position as the most dreaded man in Burma. In a thoroughly bad temper, his thoughts were in no degree soothed when they were interrupted by the appearance of an old blind man being led towards him by a Burmese

lad. At their approach Tha Zan looked up hastily, and addressed the strangers in rough tones.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "Do you know that you are in the borders of my camp, where none but my friends enter? Where are you going—like a pair of straying dogs?"

The travellers paused at the rough salutation, and the old man replied humbly:

"My lord, we are journeying to Maymyo, my son and I. As you see, I am blind, but my son is to me as other eyes. I pray you tell me if this is the road to the town I seek?"

Tha Zan rose and frowned as he strode forward to examine the strangers more closely. Then, seeing nothing suspicious in feature or dress, he condescended to reply:

"This road will take you into China sooner than to Maymyo. Your son must be as blind as you are, old man, if he does not know the east from the south."

The boy hung his head at the reproach, saying meekly:

"It is seldom that we leave our jungle home. My father and I have lived together these many years, and we grow the fruits that are needful for our life. But two days ago great misfortune fell upon us. Dacoits came by night and robbed us, burning our house, and leaving us only these few working clothes in which we now travel."

"Rags are good enough for beggars," was the Tiger-Man's coarse comment, whereupon the old man quickly replied with some show of pride:

"Speak not thus, O noble lord. We ask pardon for appearing before your honour in such garments,

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for I know by the sound of your voice that you are a man of position—one accustomed to command, and to be obeyed when you speak. But, though I may seem to be a beggar in your sight, the Lord Buddha has blessed me greatly. I own that which might be a ransom for a prince."

It was remarkable how quickly Tha Zan's demeanour changed at this information. Not only did he change in manner, but his voice immediately softened. The thought of gold had a wonderful power to stir that man to politeness.

"Indeed," he returned gently. "I ask your pardon, old man, if I have unintentionally caused you pain. I am in much trouble at present, and my speech was unguarded. That you are a man of high position yourself I instantly perceive. Pray rest, and talk with me a while. Afterwards, we shall have food together. You have much wealth, you were saying?"

As the blind man seemed rather reluctant immediately to speak of his great possessions, the simple-minded boy took the part of spokesman.

"My father is rich," he said. "He has great treasure hidden away. He was saying that he might build a pagoda before he died, like all good Burmans, and so gain much merit in the after life for good deeds to the Lord Buddha in this life. But the dacoits have robbed us——"

"And taken the treasure?" interrupted Tha Zan with an anxiety which he almost forgot to try to conceal. But the boy was simple, as we have said. Indeed, he seemed to be a very innocent sort of lad, for he immediately took the stranger into his confidence, saying :

"Oh, no. The treasure was safely hidden. Now we go to the *poongis* to dig it up for us."

"The *poongis*?" questioned the dacoit. "Why can you not dig it for yourselves? You know where it is? Well, you have hands, have you not? What need is there for monks?"

Here the blind man again took up the story.

"We know where the treasure is, my lord, and we have strong hands, made so by much work in the fields. But I told the *poongis* the purpose of my wealth, and they laid a curse upon the spot so that no man may dare to take it without their permission—nay, not even me, the owner. We would die in terrible torture if we broke the ground without permission."

Tha Zan received the latter information with a sneering laugh.

"Fools," he said, as if speaking to himself. "What fools men are to let these Buddhist monks dupe them. They have cursed me these many times, and yet I still live happily. Know this, old man: All that the *poongis* want is to handle the treasure themselves."

That was, indeed, a terrible suggestion which had the immediate effect of setting the old man's limbs trembling with agitation and fear. As for the boy, he was no less disturbed, though he made a weak attempt to soothe his father, but, it must be confessed, without much good effect.

"Say not these terrible words," the blind man pleaded. "Surely the good *poongis* would not rob an old man like me? They are my wife's jewels, and the gold with gems which I have bought with the sweat of many years of toil. They would not—they could not—beggar me thus!"

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Tha Zan smiled to himself, and he stepped forward to lay a hand on the old man's shoulder.

"Calm yourself, my brother," he said. "Perhaps the Lord Buddha has watched the treasure for you. Listen—I will myself go with you. You will lead me to the spot, and then I will put it safely into your hands. Thus I will again much merit by restoring to you your possessions——"

"And do we, your blood brothers, have no share in the adventure?" questioned a fourth voice from behind—that of Paw Kyaw, one of Tha Zan's most daring supporters. Instantly the Tiger-Man wheeled to face the intruder, and his countenance blazed with fury as he bent forward and raised his arms threateningly.

"What?" he cried passionately. "You spying rat! You creep along the grass and listen to your master, do you?"

"Master?" repeated the other dacoit, with strange recklessness. "There is no master in our land. Do we not all share alike? Has not that always been the bond?"

Tha Zan's answer was swift and terrible. His face was quite distorted with the fury that possessed him, and the man's words seemed suddenly to let loose a perfect flood of fury. He launched his heavy body forward, at the same time dealing a blow that laid the other dacoit on the ground. The spy struggled to rise again, but no sooner had he moved than Tha Zan was upon him—beating him with massive fists, and kicking him, till at last he lay helpless and probably unconscious.

"Now, is the Tiger-Man master or servant?"

demanded Tha Zan, panting in fury. But there came no answer to the question. So the dacoit contented himself with another kick, after doing which he turned to the blind man and the boy with no further pretence at concealing his identity.

"Now you know who I am. Tha Zan, called the 'Tiger-Man.' But you need have no fear if you intend to be faithful. But, if you play the jackal, that spy's fate is nothing to what is in store for you. Lead on—to the treasure. No, no ! I offer my back to no one. You go first, and—keep within reach of my *dah*, or I shall cleave your skull as readily as I would a coco-nut."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE BULLET OF PAN YI

BURNING with indignation at the scene he had just witnessed, Bob (for, of course, the boy was no other than he) was obliged to advance with the blind man towards the place where he had appointed to meet Pan Yi. He was burning at the thought of having been forced to remain a silent witness of Tha Zan's cowardly act, and even though he had brought no weapon with him he might have been tempted to betray himself by defending the weak had he not realized that by so doing he would at once defeat the whole purpose of his adventure. It was a last, desperate chance—to lead the Tiger-Man beyond hail of his comrades to where Pan Yi would be waiting armed and ready.

So it was with a well-assumed show of fear and humility that the boy forced himself to turn from the victim of Tha Zan's brutality and again take up the position of blind man's guide. And, as they walked, from time to time he spoke such words as would be likely to increase the dacoit's thirst for imaginary treasure.

"Be brave, my father," he would say encouragingly. "The distance is not now great. Soon we will reach the Golden Buddha, and our lord will not be ungenerous to his servants when he sees how much there is for all."

The blind man had been well schooled in the part he had to play. He had also been well bribed, with

an additional promise of further gifts if the exploit were successful. So he kept up a fine pretence of whimpering anxiety.

"Suppose the *poongis* have taken it away? They can command evil spirits to do their bidding, and they may have carried off my savings. My heart is very heavy this day, O my son. I fear that only evil is in store for us."

"Much evil awaits you if you do not quicken your steps," growled a voice from behind. "I am not a patient man when gold is slow to reach."

"Let not our lord be angered," Bob said. "An old man's words have but little meaning. It is but right that we should hasten; the sooner our hands may hold our portions."

Still the blind man continued to whimper, though he rapidly obeyed the order to quicken the pace.

"I fear the *poongis*, my son," he wailed. "The Golden Buddha keeps guard at their bidding. Let us give all to our lord, and then we may be preserved from evil things."

"As you will, my father," was the boy's response. "But we must shun the place where the treasure lies." And Tha Zan's greedy heart throbbed excitedly at anticipating the rich reward that would soon be his.

Onwards the trio pressed through the thickest jungle until, after three miles or so, they reached a small meadow in the centre of which stood the figure of a sitting Buddha, which some devout Burman had raised some years before.

Here Bob paused for a few moments, and gave a hasty look around. It was only a swift glance, but

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not so swift as to escape the notice of the ever-suspicious dacoit.

"What is it? Whom do you seek?" he demanded roughly.

Bob immediately lowered his eyes, and responded quietly:

"One spy has heard us to-day. I was fearful lest by chance another should have followed to learn our secret."

Tha Zan received the explanation with contempt.

"That rat!" he exclaimed. "It will be some hours before he can move—many more before he can speak. Now—where is the treasure?"

"Yonder," answered the old man, pointing towards the image with his staff. "Though my eyes are as night, yet could I go straight to the spot alone. Just under the right knee of the Lord Buddha. There the treasure lies—if the spirits have not taken it away."

"The only spirit that knew of it was the one that dwelt in your own carcase," returned the dacoit. "For your own sake, let us hope that that spirit has not made away with the jewels. Now, waste no more words. Go forward and dig."

"With what, my lord?" the old man questioned helplessly, and he spread open his hands. "Can man dig without spades?"

"You have fingers! Use them," retorted Tha Zan impatiently. But at these words the old man immediately fell upon his knees, and began to cry pleadingly:

"Oh, my lord, have mercy upon me! Have mercy upon me and my son! We dare not do this thing. A thousand devils would instantly rise out of the ground

and tear us to pieces if we even laid one finger upon the earth. Rather would we be slain now than do this evil. Spare us ! Slay us now, if needs be, for we cannot dare the *poongis'* curse ! ”

So well did the old man simulate great fear (in which pretence Bob heartily joined in the hope of gaining time until Pan Yi appeared) that Tha Zan was completely deceived.

“ Fools—thrice sons of fools ! ” was his comment. “ Know you not that the Tiger-Man fears not a thousand curses, nor ten thousand devil slaves ? Where did you say the treasure lies ? ”

“ Under the right knee of the Lord Buddha,” answered Bob, and the dacoit said boastfully :

“ Then, with my own *dah* shall the treasure be revealed, but—for this cowardice—not a single jewel shall your fingers touch ! ”

“ As my lord wills,” assented Bob, meekly, though he was inwardly amused at wondering how many jewels the dacoit’s coarse fingers would handle.

Tha Zan stepped briskly forward, and commenced digging, while the boy stole anxious glances around to see if Pan Yi was yet in sight. But there was no sign of the servant. Evidently he had made some mistake as to the time of the appointment, and Bob then began rapidly searching his brains for means by which to gain more time or to explain the absence of the much-talked-of treasure.

Then he was startled by hearing the dacoit’s *dah* strike against something that gave out a metallic ring, while at the same time Tha Zan uttered a deep sigh of gratification. Again the blade struck, and yet again, and each time was repeated that ringing sound

which unmistakably tells of metal against metal. Feverishly the Burmanese worked, while the boy—utterly forgetting the purpose of the day's errand—gazed upon the deepening hole with fascinated interest.

Now Tha Zan dropped his *dah* and fell upon his knees, scraping away the earth with his fingers like a rabbit. Then he bent down to take hold of something. It was heavy and resisted his efforts to raise it. More earth was loosened from the sides, then the dacoit exerted his full strength, and in another moment a heavy iron chest was drawn from the excavation.

Tha Zan straightened himself, and looked upon the watchers with triumph.

"If it is as full as it is heavy I may yet permit you a little share—of the dust," he remarked with a grin. Then he fell to wrenching off the lock with his *dah*. That was soon accomplished, but the heavy lid refused to open. With the man's full strength against it, it yielded slightly, but Tha Zan was obliged to call upon Bob for help. Evidently the covering was held down with powerful springs. But the united effort at last prevailed, and the lid was prized back to an angle where it remained open. A leather cloth was laid upon the contents, but the Burman quickly snatched that aside. Then he dived his hands into the box, bringing up two handfuls of priceless ornaments in gold and silver, heavily encrusted with rubies and other jewels that glittered in the sun.

So astonished was Bob at this unexpected find where nothing but plain earth had been anticipated that he quite forgot his assumed character and exclaimed in English :

"Great Scott ! If this doesn't beat——"

He stopped short, instantly realizing the slip he had made. But the error of a second was not unnoted by the dacoit. He gasped in amazement, letting the jewels fall back into the box in a tinkling stream. Next moment his face was hideously distorted with mad anger. He knew that he had been duped, and —*he knew who had duped him!*

"The son of Harwood!" were the words that broke from foaming lips, and in blind fury he flung himself upon the boy.

So swift had been the events and so sudden the actual assault that Bob had no time to guard himself from the dacoit's powerful fingers that gripped his throat, while the weight of the man's ponderous body bore him backwards to the ground.

"You—you—son of a jackal." the man cried. "You dare the tiger again? This time shall be your last, oh, spawn of a serpent! Die! Die this day—ah!"

The last word was one of agony—different from the previous wild shouts of triumph, for just then a rifle had spoken from the bush, and set a lead messenger to the dacoit's shoulder. The Tiger-Man relaxed his grip. Then another shot followed. This time Tha Zan sprang to his feet, but as he turned to face his assailant he stumbled and fell backward. Instantly another cry followed, but it was a piercing shriek that echoed and re-echoed through the jungle—the cry of a mortal in agony—in unabating torture.

Bob sprang up to find Pan Yi at his side, carrying a rifle in readiness for further duty if need be.

"Nearly too late, master," the servant said, but without any apparent regret in voice or manner.

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" Nearly too late, but—the Lord Buddha is on our side this time. Behold ! "

Bob looked to where his servant pointed.

There, at their feet lay the Tiger-Man. Alive ? Yes, but powerless for further evil. As he had stumbled, so his right arm had struck the powerful springs of the box, and the lid had snapped down, holding the man's limb as securely as though he had sprung the jaws of a trap for panthers.

Bob could not restrain a cry of joy to see his enemy conquered and at his mercy.

" At last ! At last the tiger is trapped. Your days are numbered now, O scum of the jungle ! " exclaimed Bob in triumph.

Cords of green creepers are as strong as steel ropes when properly twined. Such were soon procured by Pan Yi, and the dacoit trussed so that he could do no further harm to others or himself.

" We'll bury this unexpected treasure where it was found, and return for it another day," said the boy to Pan Yi. " Meantime " (turning to the Tiger-Man) " you march back with us to our camp. By to-night you will be in the train for Mandalay, and then—"

" The British always win. I should have remembered that," said the dacoit, thoroughly cowed, and almost pitifully broken in spirit.

## RANCHERS TO THE RESCUE

### CHAPTER I

#### THE SUMMONS

EVEN though the break-up of the winter was fairly well advanced, there still remained considerable patches of snow on the prairie and flat-lands, though, for the most part, mud and slush held their own. This may not seem very important information with which to open a story, but it is of importance, for when you are told that the thud of hoofs on the soft ground could be heard for a mile or two from the Cottonwood Ranch, it will be understood that those hoofs must have been pounding the trail with considerable force and speed.

Jack Deane and his pal, Stanley Warren, had been sitting yarning by the stove prior to turning in for the night when first the sound reached their ears. Cottonwood Ranch was generally spoken of as being somewhere near to the back of nowhere; but when visitors did take it into their heads to pass that way they usually came in daylight, or, at any time, at a reasonable pace. But this—the rapid pounding of hoofs upon the not over-hard trail—betokened something more than a canter, or even haste; it told of speed that was wild, desperate, and reckless.

At the first sound the boys sprang up and threw open the door.

"Whoever can it be at this hour of the night?" questioned Deane, the elder of the two.

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"It sounds like someone being chased by the devil," suggested Warren with a laugh, as he stared out into the pitchlike darkness beyond.

"Whoever it is he must be mad to stampede in the dark like that," the former commented. "With the trail like grease, and not a single star to guide him, it is pure madness indeed. A throw at that pace would break the necks of both the rider and his gee-gee."

Each moment the sounds grew louder as the unseen animal approached, and to the friends who stood in the doorway it almost seemed as though they were waiting for the approach of a spectre, for they could see nothing—only hear the advance, as of some ghostly rider of the plains.

Louder and louder grew the clatter as the horseman came nearer, and Deane remarked in an excited undertone: "He's coming straight for this shack!"

Even as he spoke the words, with a splashing of mud and a gasping of breath, the figure of a rider on his steed darted out from the darkness into the light of the door. The animal pulled up with a suddenness that one could hardly have believed to have been possible considering the speed of the advance, and, with the halt, the rider rolled heavily upon the ground.

With a single impulse, Jack and his companion sprang forward.

"Why, it's old Miser Davey!" exclaimed Deane as he turned the prostrate figure to the light.

"Miser Davey!" echoed Warren in amazement. "Whatever brings him here at this hour and in this state? Look at his clothes, Jack! He is half-naked and in rags."

Deane made a hasty examination of the man who was lying unconscious in the mud. Then he remarked seriously : " He seems to be in a bad way. Give us a hand, Stan, and we'll get him indoors. The broncho can take care of himself for the time being."

Dan Davey (or " Miser Davey," as he was generally known in these parts) was no light burden even for a couple of strong young cowboys, and it took a considerable effort to raise him and carry him to one of the bunk beds in the shanty. To tell the truth, no extra tenderness was devoted to the task, for Davey was not a popular person among those who had had the misfortune to have dealings with him. He usually managed to get the better of any bargain with which he was associated. Moreover, the starvation treatment which he was reputed to mete out to his son Charlie—the only helper on the ranch—had earned for him the reputation of being not only mean, but also cruel.

As he was stretched on the bed he groaned, and further examination showed that his hands and feet were badly blistered—apparently from fire ; and it was not long before Deane noticed that blood was issuing from an ugly wound on the right shoulder, suggesting the results of a discharge from a shot-gun at short range.

The elder boy looked grave at this discovery.

" It seems to me that we have tumbled upon something that we would rather have had nothing to do with, Stan," he said. " This looks like nothing more than an attempt at murder. But these burns ? How could they have come about ? His clothes are almost burnt to powder. See—you get a basin of water while

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I find some rags to bind up the wound. We'll try to make him comfortable, even though he is not very welcome. And warm up the coffee. Perhaps that will do him good."

More than an hour elapsed, however, before the boys were able to complete their first-aid by removing the mud, binding up the arm, and otherwise caring for the patient. Coffee was also tried at intervals; but it was still longer before the young ranchers had the satisfaction of seeing some signs of returning life. But at last Davey began to mutter slightly, and once or twice made efforts to open his eyes, until, eventually some semblance of consciousness returned, and he stared at his attendants with a dazed look on his face.

"That's better," said Warren, cheerfully, at these signs of returning strength. "Try a little more coffee and you'll soon be all right again."

Obediently the old man sipped the drink. Then he asked in puzzled tones: "Where am I? And—where is Charlie?"

"Charlie?" repeated Jack. "He's not here. I guess he'll be at home where you left him."

"But where am I? This is not—Riddell's ranch. You are not the old man Riddell."

"Not likely!" exclaimed Warren contemptuously. "There is nothing of the whisky-swilling Riddell about this shanty. You're at Cottonwood—with Deane and myself."

"But where's Charlie?" the man persisted. "I sent him on here first."

Thinking that perhaps the man's mind was wandering, Jack attempted to soothe him.

"Don't you worry about the kid just now," he

said. "I guess that Charlie is all right. He's quite able to take care of himself——"

"If he has enough beef inside him to keep him living," added Warren under his breath.

But Davey was not to be put off.

"I tell you that I sent the boy ahead of me some time ago," he persisted with gathering strength. "Jake Blake—the ugly robber that he is—thought he'd done for me with his shot-gun, and scared the life out of Charlie; but I saw him, just in time, as he was gripping my dollars from the old chest, and I jumped at him, yelled to Charlie to make off for Riddell's; then a lamp got knocked over in the fight, but I held on to give Charlie a start with the wad. After that I don't know what happened till I woke up and found the place in flames, Jake gone, and Charlie nowhere to be seen. So I—I managed to get on my broncho to follow, and—well, I don't know how I got here."

"I can give a pretty fair guess," said Warren at this juncture. "You must have ridden mad, and switched off at the wrong trail at the fork roads. In any case, Riddell's place is miles from here, and the Black River impassable just now with floods and ice."

The boy turned suddenly to Deane with an anxious expression on his face as he exclaimed: "Say, Jack! It'll be a poor look out for the kid if Jake Blake has got on his track."

Then, to Davey: "Would Charlie be riding or on foot?"

"I don't keep horses in the stable for boys to knock-out scampering over the prairie," was the surly rejoinder. Then suddenly an expression of mental

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agony came over the speaker's face and he cried out as though in pain, while his fingers clutched Deane's arm frantically :

" My dollars ! All my savings of years ! My dollars ! Charlie has them, and Blake—if he catches him. Oh, can't you do something to save my money ? "

With an action of utter disgust Deane shook off the clutching fingers as he would have shaken off a spider.

" You and your dirty dollars ! " he sneered. " May the whole caboodle sink to the bottom of the Black River ! Haven't you a single thought for the boy, who is possibly in the hands of that reptile Blake ? "

But the old man could think of nothing else than his money, and he writhed helplessly upon the bed as he whined repeatedly : " My dollars—my savings of years ! What shall I do ? What shall I do ? "

" Do ? " repeated Deane impatiently. " All that you can do just now is to lie where you are while Stan and I go after the boy to save him from Blake. As for your dollars——"

" I'd burn the whole derned lot, if I had my way," added Warren kindly, to which gentle sentiment Deane joined fervently :

" And so would I—gladly. Well, Stan, there's nothing for it but to get on the move as soon as it is light enough. I'll take my rifle, and you take your shot-gun. They might come in useful to make a show with, though I don't expect there will be any need to use them in any other way."

## CHAPTER II

### DOLLARS OR DEATH ?

**I**T was near dawn when the two young ranchers set out upon their unwelcome errand, and rode briskly over the familiar stretch of level prairie that lay between their ranch house and the Wascana Valley, in whose bosom the Black River had its twining course. Reaching the brow of the hill that led down a steep slope to the lower land, the boys drew rein for a few moments to select the best pathway for the descent.

The hills were not only steep, but, at that time of the year, they were also very slippery, and considerable caution had to be exercised in riding downwards. But where a sheep can find foothold, there a broncho can follow, and once the route was decided, it was only necessary to ride with a loose rein, and the horses did the rest.

"I think our best plan will be to make direct for the river," was Deane's suggestion, when the bed of the valley was reached. "If Blake has tried to follow the boy, he would know that the nipper would go for the old crossing, not knowing, or remembering, that it can't be crossed until the ice has passed. In that way he would have the youngster in a trap."

"But Charlie is on foot," said Warren. "My opinion is that he would look for cover in the bush. Charlie is no fool, though he is a bit cowed. And from what he had seen of Blake he would have sense

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enough to know that his first job would be to save his own life."

"Right enough," the older boy agreed. "Still, by cutting straight across we will be fairly certain to find Blake's tracks, even though we don't come on Charlie's. After all, Blake will lead us either away from the boy or to him. Either will satisfy us."

"Right you are," assented Warren, and once more heels were dug into the horses' sides and a brisk canter was resumed.

Reaching the thick bush that bordered the river on either bank the last speaker suddenly pulled up and pointed to a patch of snow immediately to the right.

"See, Jack!" he said. "There are horse's tracks, quite fresh, leading up the valley, as you guessed."

Deane bent from the saddle to examine the signs, remarking as he did so: "Yes; they are fresh tracks, right enough, not more than an hour or two old, and they show a walking pace. The rider of that horse must have been keeping a close look out in the dusk. We'd better follow on and trust to our good luck."

For a couple of miles or more the riders followed the tracks, which were now quite visible since the sun had risen over the horizon. Then the hoof-prints led on a sharp turn to the left, straight into the thickest of the bush and towards the river, whose roaring torrent was like nearing thunder, mingled with the harsh, grating sounds of ice grinding its way round the curves of the watercourse.

Then suddenly, above the noise of the elements, the boys heard a cry, faint enough, but yet sufficiently strong to reach the ears of the trackers. It was a

cry of fear, and at the first sound the riders quickly slipped from their horses.

"That's Charlie, and—Blake's after him!" Deane exclaimed. "We'll tie up our bronchos here and take our guns. There's no use trying to ride through this bush, and we've got to get after that lad as fast as our legs will carry us."

"I'm with you," replied Warren, following closely at the heels of his chum, who had set off almost as soon as his words were spoken.

Fired with the excitement of the chase, the boys pressed forward into the heart of the scrub, heedless of thorns, and breaking through the undergrowth that did its best to impede their progress. Then came another cry—from closer at hand this time—and this served to increase their speed, which was still further strengthened when a man's voice was heard 'calling' in hoarse accents :

"Stop, you young serpent's spawn! When I lay hands on you, I'll tear the life out of you for certain sure if you don't stop when I tell you!"

"They're over there—beyond that clearing!" cried Warren, panting with fatigue and excitement. Instantly the course was changed, and the grass patch cleared with the speed of fresh sprinters at the "hundred yards," and in a few moments more the boys were pausing to look around them at the brow of the slope that led down to the river. And there, barely fifty yards away, they saw a boy racing wildly towards the roaring, ice-packed torrent, followed by a man who was in the act of swinging a lasso over his head.

In an instant Deane's rifle was at his shoulder.

"Stop, Blake, or I'll fire!" the boy cried. But

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either the man did not hear the command or was too furious to heed it, for he continued to swing the loop in his hand preparatory to sending it flying on its deadly errand. The rifle spoke, and Blake staggered at the impact of a bullet in his leg, thus giving time to widen the distance slightly between the pursuer and his would-be victim. But he quickly recovered himself, though he dropped the rope with intent to overtake the lad and seize him with his hands.

Not venturing to take another shot for fear of possibly injuring the boy, Deane rushed forward to the rescue. Then he stopped with an exclamation of horror, for the terrified lad had given a single look backwards, had seen the furious, bearded face and outstretched arms so close behind, and next instant he had sprung out upon one of the passing blocks of ice. Mad with rage, Blake leaped to follow, and immediately the two figures were locked together on the slippery foothold of the swiftly moving ice-floe.

"They'll both be drowned!" exclaimed Deane in consternation to his friend, but to his words there came no answer, for Warren, seeing the boy in the grip of the man, without hesitation had followed to the rescue—springing from the bank of the river to the treacherous hospitality of the ice.

Then was Deane indeed stunned with fear as he saw his chum thus taking his life into his hands, though he afterwards confessed that he never before felt such an impulse to cheer as he did at that moment. Leaping from block to block, Stanley hastened forward to overtake the figures who were being rapidly swept downwards on the swift current of the river.

Once he allowed himself to speak, and that was



MAD WITH RAGE, BLAKE LEAPED TO FOLLOW.



when he called out encouragement to the young boy.

"It's all right, Charlie! I'm coming!" he cried, but it was not likely that the lad heard the voice of the friend, or that he was in a position to appreciate the words even if they reached him. For by this time Blake had pressed the boy downwards upon the ice, which swayed and dipped beneath the struggling bodies, and all Charlie's efforts were given to preventing the man from getting a grip upon his throat.

Warren did not speak again. Jumping from one little island of ice to another, he gradually succeeded in lessening the distance until he was at last close to the object of his pursuit. Then he paused for a brief space and looked around him. A large block of ice was at his feet. Without a moment more for hesitation he picked up this ready weapon, made another leap forward, and, throwing with all his strength, struck Blake full in the face. Blake uttered a single hoarse cry; then he threw up his arms and fell backwards into the churning water.

Warren leapt on to the block of ice to which Charlie still clung. With the sudden weight upon it the little floe jumped upwards with a leap that nearly sent Warren following the man. But he just managed to retain a safe position and put out his arms so as to hold the boy securely.

"Keep still," he said. "It's all right now. That serpent has gone where he deserves. Don't be scared, and I'll have you in safety in less than no time."

But it was easier to speak of safety than to attain it, and Stanley realized that when he raised his head and saw that he was being swiftly drawn into the

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mid-current of the river. But Deane had not been idle when he had collected his thoughts after the first consternation that followed Warren's plucky dash to the rescue. Blake's lasso was lying at his feet, and the rancher instinct told him to have this in readiness as the only likely means for drawing his chum from the jaws of icy death. And the moment had come to test his skill.

"Hold on, Stan!" he cried. "Twist the lasso round you, and then grip the ice for all you are worth. Ready? Right. Here she comes!"

Suiting the action to the words, Deane sent the rope whistling on a straight flight. The rope fell across his friend's body, and Warren did not delay a moment in availing himself of the needed aid.

The rope tightened, and immediately the ice raft began to swing shorewards with the current. But even then the position was still perilous, for the other blocks pressed upon the one whose cross-drift was impeding the progress of the rest. Deane, however, had taken a firm grip, while Stanley had all the strength of desperation to aid him, and gradually the distance between the raft and the shore was lessened.

The process of rescue only occupied a few minutes, but to Warren it seemed hours while he held on to the edge of the ice with one hand, feeling his fingers being cut as with a knife. And when his friend's hands at last reached him and helped his benumbed body to rise, he felt that if he had had to retain the previous hold for another moment he would have been obliged to give in and take his chance at the mercy of the river.

Deane could scarcely find words to express his joy

when he realized that his chum was indeed safe, and that Charlie was also freed from danger.

"If old Davey doesn't give you at least half of his dollars for this morning's work he deserves to lose everything that he possesses!" he exclaimed as the climax to many other, not quite so coherent, utterances. "As for you, Charlie—how are you feeling now? A little less scared?"

"I—I'm all right, thank you," the boy stammered. "But I don't know what—what father will say when he knows that—that his money is—in the middle of Black River."

"In the middle of Black River!" exclaimed Deane, half in amazement, half in laughter.

"Yes. I—I threw them there when I saw that—Blake was upon me."

At these words Warren, who had been busily engaged in binding one of his bleeding fingers with his handkerchief, let loose a peal of laughter that scared the birds away from the neighbouring trees.

"You tossed the dollars into the water, did you?" he asked, between his peals of laughing. "Well, all that I can say, kid, is that you did the best day's work that ever you did in all your little life. If Blake finds them, let him keep them. Dollar-grubbing is no job for a decent rancher."

To which excellent sentiment Deane added a fervent  
"Hear! hear!"

# “ LITTLE WOLF ” THE BRAVE

## CHAPTER I

### “ A COWARD DOG ”

“ **I**S Little Wolf but a coward dog ? Is he the son of a chief, or must he always dwell in the tents with the women ? ”

The face of Thunder Cloud, the great chief of the Chippewas, was as dark as his name while he hurled these questions with fierce contempt towards the lad who stood before him with bent head. The boy made no answer to his father’s demands, but the surrounding crowd of Indian warriors and braves returned the questioning with a roar of anger that came like a storm wind as it rushes across the prairie.

“ He is no son of the Chippewas ! ” they cried. And the outer circle of women uttered shrill cries of derision, and pointed their fingers towards the lad with the Indian sign of contempt.

The scene was that of the annual Sun Dance, when boys were wont to be put through a severe test of their courage that they might gain the coveted name of “ Brave,” and be reckoned as men, fit to chase the buffalo in company with the mighty hunters of the tribe, fit to march with warriors on the war trail. This ceremony had been forbidden by the British Government, but the humane law was for long defied by many in secret.

One by one, lads had come forward to be prepared for the ordeal. A stout pole had been erected in the

centre of a clearing in Wascana Creek, and from its summit depended a number of raw-hide thongs at the lower ends of which were fastened pointed sticks, each about a foot and a half in length. Forming a large circle stood the old warriors and braves, with the women in the background. All were eagerly awaiting the great event of the year, and were excitedly disputing among themselves how each boy would bear the test of his bravery to endure pain without flinching.

In the centre, beside the pole, stood Chief Thunder Cloud, dressed in all the finery of ermine robes, leggings trimmed with scalp-locks, and head-dress of eagle feathers, each of which represented a great man slain in battle. He held a hunting-knife in his right hand, as, one by one, the boys came forward to be prepared. Each was naked, except for a loin-cloth, and as the lad presented himself, the chief rapidly made a cut in the loose flesh at each side of the candidate's breast. Through these cuts were inserted the ends of the short stick. Then the youth retired to the edge of the circle as far as the cord would allow him, there to wait until all were ready to begin the Sun Dance.

On this occasion there were twelve candidates. One had been unable to restrain a slight cry of pain as the knife did its work, so, amid jeers, he was forced to slink away in shame to live in the women's tents until another year gave him an opportunity to redeem his honour.

Now all were ready but one. This was Little Wolf, the son of the chief himself. But Little Wolf was a sensitive lad. For some time he had worked on a white man's ranch, and (rightly or wrongly) had learned to abhor the savage rites of his people. He

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had not been able to speak against the ordeal of the Sun Dance, but when he came to face the torture his sensitive nature shuddered at the sight of his bleeding friends pretending to be brave while they stood in agony awaiting the signal to begin the dance.

“ My father, spare Little Wolf from this ! ” he had pleaded. “ Little Wolf will work—he will hunt, he will fight for his people. If it were to save the life of his chief, gladly would he even gather burning brands to his bosom. But this is only boasting. The pale-face needs not the Sun Dance to make him brave. Little Wolf can be brave as the white man is ! ”

It was then the terrible wrath of Thunder Cloud had broken forth.

“ Is Little Wolf but a coward dog ? Is the son of Thunder Cloud but a rabbit that hides in the grass when the hawk soars ? ” Then the old man turned to the warriors around.

“ This comes of lending our children to the teaching of the white man ! ” he cried bitterly.

“ They seek to kill the spirit of the red man ! ” returned one of the warriors, and another questioned scoffingly : “ Is Little Wolf a plume from the crest of Thunder Cloud, or is he but down plucked from the bosom of the prairie chicken ? ” Then the women began to laugh derisively, crying : “ Papoose ! Squaw papoose ! ” (Child ! girl child !)

From out of the circle of angry onlookers then sprang forward the chief Medicine Man of the Chippewas in his head-dress of fox skin, his grotesque paint, and decorations of human bones. He flung himself about in a frenzy of passion, and spat upon the hapless lad, to the loud approval of the Indians.

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"This is no son of Thunder Cloud!" he exclaimed.  
"He is the son of a serpent. Let him look upon the young braves as they win their scalping-knives. Then let him be driven from the tribe with blows and contempt. I, Great Medicine, have spoken!"

Deep muttering and cries of approval greeted this pronouncement, causing the unfortunate boy to shrink still more before the reproaches of his people, for, be it remembered, to wince at pain of any degree is the greatest disgrace that any redskin could know in those days. Slowly he raised his head to look upon the face of the angry chief, while he spoke with a trembling voice:

"My father, have pity on Little Wolf!"

But for answer, Thunder Cloud straightened his massive form to its full height in proud contempt, stared stonily at the youth, and then swung his arm with a blow that felled his son to the ground.

"Lie there, O coward dog!" he exclaimed in wrath. "Lie there and see the brave sons of the red men win their scalping-knives! Then you shall be driven from the camp of the Chippewas like a stranger cur, to seek your food where you will. No longer shall you be a son of Thunder Cloud. Perhaps the pale-faces will have scraps to throw away! Such will be fit food for you."

The surrounding Indians all muttered their approval of this sentence of exile as the chief then turned and raised his arm as a sign for the Sun Dance to commence.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SUN DANCE

OBEDIENT to the signal, the women at once began to chant a shrill song, while some of the men beat the tom-toms to a slow measure. At the same moment the waiting boys began to move slowly round the circle "clockwise," as the sun was believed to move round the earth on his daily journey.

At first the dance was slow. As the lads moved, the keen eyes of the audience watched them to see that none attempted to lessen the ordeal by any slackening of the strain upon the cords that united them to the centre pole. Every thong must be kept taut, the aim being that the sticks should tear themselves free from the flesh without a single murmur of pain coming from any of the sufferers. Then each one would be deemed a "brave"—a man worthy of all the privileges of the hunt and war.

Gradually the measure of the music was increased in speed, and the steps of the dancers changed into a series of leaps, while their bodies posed in the most grotesque attitudes as the initiates shrilly laughed their scorn of pain.

"Behold, O brothers, the son of Eagle Feather!" one of the proud fathers cried in praise of his son. "See how he laughs!"

"He is none braver than the son of Fleet Foot," another Indian returned. "Watch how he leaps backward to hasten the release through greater pain. Could any brave do more?"

"Harken to the son of Running Water!" exhorted a third. "What is it that he says? 'Pain, I love you! Do you think that you are the claws of the black panther to make wounds like he? Ugh! You are but the little thorns in the grass!' Brave, indeed, is the son of Running Water. The eyes of Little Wolf must burst with envy as he sees such courage."

Round and round that dreadful circle the boys pursued the mad dance—shrieking words of defiance at the cords, boasting the deeds of prowess that they would accomplish in the days to come, and forcing wild laughter to take the place of cries of pain. Then, one by one, the stakes tore their way through the bleeding flesh, and as each boy was thus freed the woods rang with the sounds of savage applause. The lad was now a "brave"—tried and triumphant.

The last youth came through his trial with particular glory. His ordeal had been long. In vain he had exerted every effort to procure his release, but the result was so long delayed that it seemed as though he must surely fall exhausted before the stake did its cruel work. But his marvellous powers of endurance prevailed. With a final cry of defiance and a terrible strain on the chord, freedom was attained at last.

Wild were the shrieks of delight that hailed the moment. It was such applause as might have greeted a victorious gladiator in the Roman arena.

But suddenly the sounds of rejoicing gave place to howls of anger (so quickly does the Indian nature change from joy to rage), for Thunder Cloud's great voice was heard above the din.

"Up, dog! Fall upon him, braves! Thunder

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Cloud has no son now. Chase this cur from the camp of the Chippewas!"

Instantly Little Wolf sprang from the ground where he had been lying almost dazed during the recent proceedings. He gazed around him with wide-eyed wonder. He saw the Chippewas rushing towards him, picking up sticks and stones as they ran. It seemed as though a tornado of wrath had burst upon him. To await such a storm would be certain death.

A missile struck him. Then the boy's brain became a whirl. He could no longer reason calmly. He had but one thought—to save his life. The narrow trail through the bush was close behind him. He turned sharply and, like a deer pressed by the hounds, he darted for possible safety.

On the boy fled in a blind chase for refuge. Not once did he look behind. The loud cries of the red men were enough to tell him how closely he was pursued. More than once clods of earth and small stones reached the lad, but he was barely conscious of the blows. Panting, bleeding from the wounds caused by thorns and branches, he fled without slackening of speed.

Whether at last he outran his pursuers and became lost to their sight, or whether they only meant to drive him beyond the limits of their camp, we cannot say; but the time came when Little Wolf realized that he was no longer pressed, and he paused for a few moments by a friendly tree to regain his breath.

He did not, however, dare to wait long, weak though he was. It was not unlikely that his enemies were stalking him in silent stealth, and would suddenly leap upon him from the bushes. So again the boy ran, though his steps were slower and staggering.

Still, the ruling thought of putting distance between himself and the camp gave him a little strength.

But the time came when the weary limbs refused to obey. Little Wolf stood for a few moments, swaying helpless and dazed. Then nature conquered. A moan broke from the boy's lips as, throwing up his arms, he fell forward unconscious upon the ground.

## CHAPTER III

### FIERY ARROW

LITTLE Wolf awoke. He turned on his back and opened his eyes. It was night—black night, without a single star to cheer the dark solitude of the forest. For a time the boy just lay at rest. The period of unconsciousness had served to restore much of his usual strength, but it was good to feel that, for the time at least, he might rest without fear of foes.

Presently he started, for he thought he heard the sound of a human voice at no great distance. He sat up quickly and listened anxiously. But the next moment he sighed with relief. The voice was not that of one of his people. It was that of a white man, and, as the sound changed from time to time, the boy gathered that two men were speaking.

With Indian caution Little Wolf did not betray his presence, but crept noiselessly forward to discover the strangers. So stealthily did he move that he reached a small clump of willows, at the opposite side of which he found two men sitting smoking, and engaged in earnest conversation by a small campfire.

They were indeed pale-faces. One was already known to Little Wolf as Fiery Arrow, the most determined police scout of the Western plains: the other was a stranger to the boy, but had the appearance of one of similar trade. Little Wolf had lived among

white men, so he had no difficulty in understanding the conversation which he overheard.

"I've got the man in my hands now," Fiery Arrow was saying. "Thunder Cloud knows right well that the Government has forbidden them Sun Dances, and the varmint has got to be taught a lesson right now."

"I guess his kind takes a lot of teaching," the other man commented, to which the first speaker returned roughly :

"You may just bet your life, Joe Randall, that I've got the little school-mam in my hands that'll teach the lesson without any mistakes. It ain't for nothing that the reds call me 'Fiery Arrow.' My arrows go slick enough, and never miss, and—they know it."

"True enough," was the rejoinder. "I reckon if you'd cut a notch in that rifle of yours for every redskin bagged you'd have mighty little of the school-mam left by now."

It was a grim joke which both the men enjoyed, nor was its meaning lost upon Little Wolf. His first impulse was to make tracks backwards as quickly as possible, but the next remarks of the men caused him to delay for further listening.

"Pity we did not get there in time to stop the whole show," Joe was saying. "It seems to me that we've come just a bit too late to be of any use."

"Not a bit of it," said Fiery Arrow. "Them reds are as cute as foxes. You may take my word for that. I know the redskin from his top-knot feathers to the soles of his moccasins. We've got to prove that Thunder Cloud broke the law. It would take a cute

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prairie lawyer to prove an Indian's intention. But now we'll have the new braves as evidence, and I mean to take Thunder Cloud at dawn, alive or dead."

The second scout laughed at his companion's words.

"I guess he'll be a deader, right enough. Thunder Cloud ain't no pick-pocket to put the shackles on as gently as a lady puts on her bangles."

"It's all one to me," Fiery Arrow responded airily. "Dead or alive. If I have any preference, as far as redskins are concerned, I'd rather have a dead than a living one."

To this conversation Little Wolf listened in horror.

"Dead or alive!" he repeated to himself. And he knew that there was not a spot on the plains where the name of Fiery Arrow was not always of spoken in the same tone as that of "Death." To the Indian youth's understanding the ambition of these men was the slaying of the chief, his father, and with that terrible thought all the old love of a son rushed back into his mind.

Yes, he had been driven from the tents of his people like an outcast dog. Thunder Cloud himself had ordered the act. Branded as a coward, the name of Little Wolf would henceforth be a cause for jeers, and the laughter of children. Yet, Thunder Cloud was in danger! The boy forgot all his own injuries in the one thought that now drove out all others:

"I must save my father from the vengeance of Fiery Arrow!"

Once decided as to his course of action Little Wolf did not wait to hear more. Stealthily as he had come, as stealthily did he retire far back into the darkness

of the bush, with the noiseless, creeping movement of a snake. Nor did he dare to rise to his feet until the scouts' camp-fire was but a speck of light in the distance.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MAKING OF A BRAVE

THUNDER CLOUD had slept but little that night. He had been proud of his only son—very proud—and though he had felt keenly the disgrace of Little Wolf's cowardice, and believed that he had done right in disowning the boy, the old chief's hidden sorrow was greater than his anger. Most of the night had been passed in thoughts of the boy whom he did not expect ever to see again, and when at last sleep came to him, it was only the restless sleep of a troubled mind.

When dawn appeared Thunder Cloud was awakened by the light coming through the opening of his tent flap. He started up. A figure stood in the entrance, and it was none other than the figure of Little Wolf. At first the chief's impulse was to take the boy in his arms and rejoice over the home-coming. But the red man's pride of race conquered the father-love.

"What does the coward Little Wolf want in the tent of a Chippewa chief?" he demanded scornfully.

The boy did not answer the question directly; but responded in quiet, persuasive tones:

"Thunder Cloud must go—quickly. There is great darkness on his trail."

"Darkness?" returned the Chief. "Does the coward dog think that Thunder Cloud must also be afraid of danger?"

Still the boy pressed the purpose for which he was probably risking his life.

"Thunder Cloud must go! Through the darkness comes Fiery Arrow with the white man's vengeance for the Sun Dance which he has forbidden. He comes to seek the life of Thunder Cloud—my father."

The last two words were spoken with strange tenderness. But they were unheeded by the old chief, who had heard little but the dreaded name of Fiery Arrow.

"Fiery Arrow!" he echoed, aghast at the thought.  
"He—coming to Chippewa camp?"

"Even so," was the reply.

Then there was silence between the father and son. The chief folded his arms and bent his head in thought while he muttered half aloud and half to himself.

"White men are many, and their guns speak many times. If Thunder Cloud's young men kill Fiery Arrow, then soldiers come and take away every brave and shut him in stone walls, and cast lasso round their necks. The burning arrows fall quickly and travel far. Where can Thunder Cloud escape?"

Then eager and rapid words came from Little Wolf.

"My father can escape if he will but heed the words of his son. Let Thunder Cloud cast the robes of a chief about the shoulders of Little Wolf. Little Wolf will run among trees. Then will Fiery Arrow follow a serpent trail while Thunder Cloud finds the cave by running water—there to hide until the white man's anger be no more."

One of a hunted people, the chief was not slow to grasp the wisdom of his son's words, and he immediately began to array the boy in the ermine

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robes. And he smiled to himself with satisfaction at the cunning device, determining that, for this service, he would surely recall Little Wolf to the favour of his people. But he thought it well to utter a warning before leaving for safety.

"The White Man has laws for hurting," he said. "He calls, and if red man not stop, he shoots. And Fiery Arrow shoots straight. Little Wolf will not run too far? Or is it that he has found some great medicine that the burning arrows will not reach him?"

"Hark!" interrupted Little Wolf, in a whisper. "The white men come. I heard a chipmunk's cry of warning. Fly, quick, my father. Let Thunder Cloud have no fear. Little Wolf shall be a brave this day. He will be the son of a chief—this one day!" And without another word the boy swiftly turned and left the shelter of the tent.

Soon the scouts entered the camp and marched direct to the chief tent.

"Is anyone in this wigwam?" Fiery Arrow demanded.

Receiving no answer, Joe entered the tent with revolver in hand, but quickly returned, saying: "The bird has flown, Fiery. But he can't be far away. His sleeping-robies are still warm, and his weapons are beside the pillow."

"Where is Thunder Cloud?" the chief Scout then demanded angrily from some Indians who had come up at the sound of voices. "He skulks and hides like a fox when Fiery Arrow comes, does he? But it's not a bit of good hiding from me, and you all know it darned well. Where is he?"

"We do not know where Thunder Cloud has gone," answered a brave nearby, to which Fiery Arrow retorted sharply:

"You can find him, and you must!"

The Indians exchanged a few words among themselves, after which an old warrior came forward as spokesman for the others.

"Our young men have not forked tongues," he said. "They know not where Thunder Cloud has gone. He rested in his wigwam, and he has vanished with the rising of the sun."

"Gone up with the mist? A likely story!" retorted the scout sarcastically. "Now look you here, redskins, you have a hiding-place in these parts. Send the young men to that place and they will find the chief. Bring him to me, and all will be well with you. Our business is with Thunder Cloud only. So bring him, or guide me to him, or else—well, you know what will happen when my gun begins its great medicine—"

"Hi! There he is!" ejaculated the other scout at that moment, at the same time pointing to a knoll at some distance on which was plainly seen a figure wearing the unmistakable robes and plumes of a chief.

Fiery Arrow was on the track in an instant, though the Indians stood in their usual stolid manner to witness what would happen next. The figure disappeared into the bush, but the scouts followed quickly—now catching a glimpse of the fugitive, again losing sight of him in the thickness of the bush.

And there was another watcher of the scene. That was Thunder Cloud himself, having found a refuge

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among some friendly boulders, which hid him from view, but allowed him to have a fair sight of the proceedings. He noted Little Wolf's tactics with delight.

"Ha!" he said to himself. "Little Wolf knows how to hide and keep himself out of danger. He will lead white men by serpent trail—here, there, but never near—and then—he disappear for ever. Good!"

Little Wolf did truly lead the man-hunters on a twining path. But he did not reckon upon the equal cunning of Fiery Arrow. Telling his companion to follow in one direction, so as to continue the direct chase, the older scout doubled on his tracks in a short cut to a spot where the boy would likely cross. There he crouched—calm and patient—with rifle ready for a swift aim, and in a few minutes a glimpse of the ermine robes betokened that the ruse was likely to be successful.

"Stop, Thunder Cloud! Stop!" the order rang out. But seemingly the fugitive did not hear the command, for he continued running recklessly within easy range.

Then, for the first time, Thunder Cloud realized the risk that the boy had taken upon himself, and more—like a flash of light in the darkness the truth came to him that his son was knowingly offering his life to save his father.

Heedless of personal danger now, the chief ran for a crag from which he called frantically:

"Foolish Little Wolf! Run faster! Fling off robes! Fiery Arrow—look—look! Here is he whom you seek! Take my life, but—"

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"For the last time—stop, or I fire!" called the scout. Then he bent his head, took swift aim, and the "burning arrow" found its mark. A cry of agony echoed the shot, and the robes of a chief fell from the youth's shoulders as the lad sank upon the ground.

"Got 'im!" Fiery Arrow exclaimed with satisfaction as he saw the result of his quick shot. Then he was heard to exclaim aghast: "Why, what is the meaning of this? This is not Thunder Cloud! This is just a boy!"

"My boy!" said a deep voice from behind the scout, and the man turned to find himself facing the very person whose end he had sought!

"You, Thunder Cloud? What derned trick is this you have been playing?"

The old Chippewa straightened himself proudly and looked into the eyes of his enemy.

"I am the white man's captive," he said solemnly. "Take me! There lies Little Wolf—the brave! He has given his life for me."

Then the chief's voice was raised to a wail of distress, which even his hard training could not restrain. "Oh, white man!" he cried, "how did I know that Little Wolf would do this—my Little Wolf—my son—my brave! Take me now, white man. Thunder Cloud has no wish to live any more. He shall never wear the robes of a chief again!"

Very sternly did the grim old scout regard the Indian. His right hand went to his pocket for the handcuffs. Then his eyes met those of Joe Randall, and with a sudden brisk movement he stepped to one side, exclaiming sharply:

"Take you, Thunder Cloud? Derned if I do!"

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This is the worst day's work that my hand has ever done. Little Wolf was a big chief. Wrap him in a chief's robes, and put him to rest where the brave men lie, and—— Come along, Joe! If I stay here another minute I'll be blubbering like a kid in front of all these redskins."

And the two scouts strode off quickly towards the home track.

## BLACK HAWK'S REVENGE

### CHAPTER I

#### THE HUNTING CAMP

A LARGE band of hunting Crees had set their camp in the beautiful valley of the Wascana Creek.

For many months the Indians had prospered in the far northern regions of the Slave Lakes. They had trapped beaver, mink, and skunk in numbers, and had added a few black and silver fox pelts to the "bag"—those rare trophies of the trapper's skill. Now they were returning to the home camp at Fort Qu'appelle, where the whole tribe would meet for a feast of many days, and when the best furs would be selected from the bales of each band for disposal to traders for the common good of the tribe.

The Wascana ground was about three days' journey from the final destination, but Indians on the home trail always felt as though the long journeyings were over when this spot was reached. The rest of the way would be in the bosom of a pleasant valley, where fruit, game, and water were plentiful.

The hunters and their families had contented hearts as they dismounted from their *shaganappies* (native ponies), unpacked the little "Red River" carts, that so greatly resembled gipsy tents on wheels, and pitched their tepees preparatory to a midday meal, for it was only the noon of a warm autumn day when the silver waters of the Wascana were reached.

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The men squatted at one side in solemn groups, while the squaws performed the laborious duties of pitching the tents and lighting fires. Pouches of *kinni-ka-nik* (tobacco mixed with powdered bark of red willow) were handed round while each old hunter filled his redstone pipe, and the children ran off to play.

Yes, it was a time of peaceful happiness until, later in the day, a white man came to disturb the scene. He arrived in a buckboard, which was laden with a couple of packing cases. To some, he was a stranger ; to others, he was already known as a fur trader of whom not much could be said that was good. But Indians are always a polite people, and the hunters rose quietly to give the stranger welcome.

The trader had apparently no doubts as to his reception. He seemed to take it for granted that all would be pleased to see him. His bearded face was all smiles as he descended from his buckboard, and he immediately began to shake hands heartily with the nearest Indians.

"*Ha'nitchie!* (friend)," he said, in the customary form of salutation. "My brothers have made good hunting, I hear ! The buffalo birds have carried stories of many mink and beaver trapped by the cunning of the Crees. Who so good hunters as they ? "

"There will be great feasting by the chief's tent when the Crees return to Fort Qu'appelle," returned one of the red men.

That was his polite way of intimating that the stories of the birds had been well founded, but that there was no intention of opening up trade until the

destination was reached. To this the trader gave hearty congratulations, but added :

" It is good to keep the best of the chase for the eyes of the chief, but my red brothers will not refuse to trade one or two little furs—not the best, of course ; only the poorest—with an old friend of the Crees in Wascana ? I have good powder and tobacco in one of those cases. In the other case—well, perhaps I may show it later on. But now—a hunting-knife or two, a few beads for moccasins, a plug or two of tobacco to carry you on the trail. What say you ? Are you willing to trade a few skins for these ? "

As the man spoke he produced a few of the alluring trifles from one of the cases, and held them forward invitingly to the Indians. One or two of the younger braves eyed the treasures greedily, and uttered short ejaculations of delight.

Just then, however, Great Bear (the leader of the expedition) strode forward and faced the trader.

" The pale-face is welcome to the tents of the Crees," he said in a deep voice. " He is free to rest with us, and to eat with us. But it is not good to trade until all the tribe be gathered at Fort Qu'appelle. That is the custom of the Crees. The white man knows that well."

To any ordinary trader these words would have been final. But Dan Reynolds was no ordinary representative of his kind. He was not the man to take a hint that did not please him, and, recognizing the speaker, he held out his hand with rough heartiness.

" Oh, it's you, Great Bear ! " he exclaimed. " And mighty glad I am to see the face of an old friend.

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It's many a long day since we've smoked a peace pipe together."

The old hunter saw the outstretched hand, but he disdained it. He proudly folded his arms tightly in his blanket robe and regarded the trader with a proud look.

"The white man speaks true words," was the Indian's reply. "It is many suns since Great Bear smoked a peace pipe with him who is named 'Red Fox.'"

But even this use of a detested nickname was not sufficient to repulse Dan Reynolds. He could accept insults by the dozen quite cheerfully so long as it suited his purpose to do so. And though he winced at the name, he chose to pretend that he had not felt the sting.

"I know that Great Bear is ever pleased to see the face of a friend," was his reply, to which the hunter instantly returned, meaningly :

"It is well spoken. The face of a *friend* is always pleasing to the eyes of Great Bear."

This time Reynolds was nearly goaded to real anger. He tried to hide his feelings from the other onlookers, but he could not restrain himself from growling to the old Indian in an undertone :

"Derned glad you were to see me in those days. At that time it was all trade with Dan Reynolds and no trade with any other. Red Fox, as you call him, was a brother in Great Bear's tepee in the days when the buffalo were many on the prairie."

The Indian hunter nodded slowly and thoughtfully. Then he responded slowly :

"Once more the white man speaks true. There

were days when Red Fox was a brother in the wigwams of the red men. But there was no little papoose (child) in Great Bear's tent then. But the little buck papoose came, and the spirit of the bear changed. The papoose is now a brave—fit to wear the robes of a chief. So it is not good that Red Fox should now be a brother in the tents of the Crees. My white brother knows why the peace pipe has not been lit between us these many suns."

Dan Reynolds had no difficulty in fully understanding all that the Indian's words were meant to convey. But he was determined on the success of his errand that day. He was forced to swallow his repulse from one quarter, but the unfriendliness of one (he reasoned rightly) did not mean that all would regard him in the same manner. So he attempted to conceal his discomfiture with a forced laugh, and turned from the leader of the band to the other Crees.

"Well, brothers!" he exclaimed heartily. "Great Bear don't want to trade with me. What about you? There's good trade waiting for you, if you only choose to take it. And only the worst of the skins is all I seek—only the torn or the thin furs."

There were evident signs that the trader's guile would prevail. There were even mutterings to the effect that it was not right of Great Bear to overlook such a chance for disposing of the wares that certainly would not bring much reward at Fort Qu'appelle, for there are always some furs that have been mutilated with the traps, or spoiled with the skinning, and these fetch but small price in the market.

The old hunter noted these signs of dissent, and he

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turned quickly to face his people while he addressed them in ringing tones.

"Wait, my braves! Listen, my brothers all! What the pale-face has said is true. We have heard his words, and our old hunters know that the words are as arrows that come straight from the bow. The time was when Red Fox and Great Bear were friends, and smoked the peace pipe together. But many suns have passed since then. Many a hunting camp did we share, and many a trail did we follow as brothers.

"But," he continued slowly, "the day came when Red Fox brought an enemy to the tents of the Crees—an enemy that slew our young men like the arrows and tomahawks of the Blackfoot when they raid by night. He brought Chief Fire-water! He made us poor—made our warriors weak as women. Then the Crees drove Red Fox from their camp, though he fled on the home trail with the blood of our young men dripping from his jaws. Say, my red brothers! shall the Red Fox, who brings Chief Fire-water, be again a friend in the Cree tents?"

The appeal was made to silent listeners, and some were beginning to turn aside shamefacedly when the trader sprang forward and with sneering tones exerted his utmost to hold the ground that seemed to be slipping from under his feet.

"Are you slaves?" he cried. "Are you women that you must cower before the words of an old man whose years have made his brain as water?"

"Great Bear is a big hunter," returned one of the younger men, to which Reynolds retorted contemptuously:

"He is a mighty boaster. He leads the hunt, and

so he thinks that all must whine at his feet like whipped dogs when he speaks. Perhaps he thinks that he has become chief of the Crees, and that Eagle Feather has passed to the Happy Hunting-grounds? Perhaps in his tottering old age, his eyes have become blind, and he sees his blanket as an ermine robe? Know you not the story of the little rabbit who put some long fur on his head and said: 'Behold what a great buffalo am I!?' But you are not old. You have not become foolish. See! If you don't want to trade, I give you presents! Now, will you believe that Red Fox is your friend? There! Drink of the rain while it falls! I ask nothing from you in return."

As he spoke Reynolds grabbed a handful of beads and a few small cakes of tobacco from the open case, and scattered them among the young men.

## CHAPTER II

### CHIEF FIRE-WATER

THE Indians did not delay many minutes in taking advantage of the windfall, for they struggled on the ground to secure shares, like children at a sweet scramble. Thus, in a moment, was good temper generally restored to all but Great Bear and a lad who had come closely to the old man's side, and was asking in a puzzled voice :

" Why is this, father ? Why does the white man give of his trade ? Black Hawk would also share, but he dares not while the thunder is on the face of Great Bear."

Hearing the voice beside him, the hunter turned and looked upon the lad with a gentler mien.

" Black Hawk is but a young brave. He knows not the ways of such men as these. All the pale-faces are not as he ; but Red Fox is bad medicine. He brings death in his hands. Black Hawk will not trade with the Red Fox. Nay, if the hour ever comes when he can avenge his tribe he will not stay his hand. My little Black Hawk will promise ? "

" He will promise," returned the boy solemnly, as he laid his hand on the hilt of the large hunting-knife that hung at his father's side, thus registering his vow in the Indian way.

Meantime the guile of the trader had accomplished its aim. True to the instincts of the red men who disdained to accept gifts without some return, a few

of the Indians hastened to their tents to procure furs. And thus was the bartering begun.

More presents were scattered, and soon a brisk trade was in progress. Tobacco, knives, and beads were chiefly welcomed.

It would have been useless now for Great Bear to protest. The honour of his people was at stake, and the old man was obliged to remain inactive with his son, while he witnessed the choicest spoils of the long hunt being bartered for the merest trifles.

At last Reynolds seemed to have come to the end of his supplies. It had not been a large stock, so it was soon exhausted. But the second case on the buckboard was as yet unopened, and some of the more inquisitive of the young men expressed curiosity as to the contents. The older men knew, from past experience.

"It's nothing that would be of any use to you," said Reynolds indifferently to the questions put. Then he added : "At least, the old squaw who treats you like papooses would show much anger if I lifted the cover."

One or two of the older hunters were heard to mutter disapprovingly of this disparaging slight to their leader, but they did not openly resent it, while one of the younger braves remarked sulkily :

"Great Bear is not a chief. We are not children to do his bidding except on the hunting trail. We have made good trade with the pale-face. Perhaps there are yet good furs that the red men would trade for the things in that box."

"Perhaps," repeated the trader with a careless laugh. "At any rate, there's no harm in having a

look. It is a box of rattlesnakes. And not even a chief can forbid the eyes of his braves to look where they will. So—look, my brothers!"

Reynolds had moved to the rear of the buckboard, and, as he had been speaking, he let fall the hinged end of the second case and displayed a small wooden keg to which was affixed a wooden tap.

" You see, it is only a little of what I am taking home for my white friends—a little of what you call 'fire-water,' which my white brothers enjoy. They have no pretended chief to scold them like dogs and forbid them to enjoy their pleasures."

Yes, Dan Reynolds was up to all the tricks of his evil trade. He knew that there were very few Indians who, like Great Bear, could resist the call of Chief Fire-water. He noted the light of desire flash into the eyes of even the old men. Now, surely, might he reckon the best trophies of the hunt as good as his own! A tin cup was at hand. He filled it from the tap, and afterwards handed it to the nearest Indian, saying invitingly : " Share that among you, brothers! And there's more here for the friends of Red Fox when that little lot is finished."

But the victory was not yet complete. Great Bear made one last effort for the honour of the Crees. He sprang forward and passionately dashed the cup to the ground before it left the hands of the giver.

" *Ka-win! Ka-win!* " (No! No!) he thundered as he spread his arms with an action that seemed like one trying to shelter his people from an enemy. " *Ka-win*, O Crees! Hearken to the words of an old man! Great Bear has seen many suns. He has seen

young men grow up to be braves—strong in the chase and valiant on the war-path. And—he has seen them fall before the great Chief Fire-water. They have then fallen—fallen—just as the ripe corn falls before the hailstorm. Worse than forest flames—more cruel than the raiding Blackfoot—more terrible than the Sioux scalping-knives is Chief Fire-water."

Then, pausing for an instant, he continued :

" Give back the beads and powder ! Take back the furs for which you have travelled so far and suffered so much privation ! Listen not to the flattering words of that serpent tongue, for he comes to steal your lives ! "

The appeal was flung out with all the force and passion of which the old hunter was capable. The blanket had fallen from his head, and the plumes that decked his black hair were quivering with the effort of the utterances.

But as well might the breath of a sparrow have sought to shake the oak. The fumes of the spirit had arisen from the grass and reached the nostrils of the surrounding Indians. They were a stronger appeal than mere words.

" The old raven croaks to the wolves," Reynolds sneered as he picked up the cup and refilled it to the brim.

" The old bear has lost his claws and courage," someone remarked.

It was a weak attempt at wit, but it was greeted with hearty applause as the speaker stretched out his hand for the cup, and swallowed the fiery contents at a gulp.

That was the beginning of the end. Envy for the

one fired the desires of the many. Roughly was Great Bear thrust to one side. Old and young united in noisy clamouring to be immediate sharers of the contents of the keg.

But the Red Fox laughed good-humouredly as he shook his head.

"No! No!" he said. "For those that bring their furs the keg will give of its best. It's first come, first served. You understand enough English for that. So, trot along the skins, and soon you will feel yourselves in the Happy Hunting-grounds."

The Indians needed no further coaxing. There was a general rush for the tents, and speedily the men returned to fling at the trader's feet the choicest spoils of the hunt in return for a small draught of the liquor. Beaver, silver fox, and ermine were all flung in a heap, while the men hustled one another in their eagerness to be first to receive their reward. And, as the unfair bartering continued, so increased the uproar in the camp as Chief Fire-water took possession of his victims.

The sun was setting, and as the Indians soon began to leap and yell with the madness born of the liquor, it seemed as though frenzied demons had been let loose in the gloomy bush. Some of the younger braves, boasting of their courage, then took to slashing their breasts and arms with knives. Others, more frantic, became blind to the sacred ties of tribal brotherhood, and fought with each other as if they had been in deadly conflict with ancient enemies.

And, as if in a horrible dream, Great Bear had stood aside. Helpless to stay the unbridled passions

of his people, he could only view the sad scene with bitter sorrow in his heart. He stood motionless like a figure in bronze, with his head bent low in shame upon his breast.

Suddenly life started into every muscle and nerve of the old man's figure. He had heard a sound—the cry of a boy. Instantly he recognized it with a father's instinct. It was that of his son. He raised his head sharply to seek the cause.

Drawn from his father's side by boyish curiosity, the lad had come close to the trader. In an impulse of reckless revenge for former insults, the Red Fox had sought to vent on the son the spleen that he dared not vent upon the father. A man of great strength, he had suddenly seized Black Hawk in one arm and pressed the tin cup against the lad's lips with an effort to force him to drink the contents.

"Drink, you son of a serpent!" Reynolds had exclaimed aloud just before the cry that had awakened the father to a knowledge of events.

Then followed a roar of anger like that of his namesake bear as the old Indian reared his great figure to its full height. He was once again the warrior of days when strength and courage daily meant life itself. The instinct of a wild animal roused to protect its young was that which lent a young man's strength to the old Indian's limbs. He leapt forward with an athlete's agility. Then he snatched the long hunting-knife from his side, and sent it hurtling through the air like an arrow from the string. The weapon missed its mark, and sank quivering in the side of the packing case behind. But the trader heard the hiss of the blade as it passed his head. Instantly he

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dropped his victim, jerked a revolver from his hip, and fired.

The bullet flew straighter than the steel.

Great Bear threw up his arms with a moan and fell face downwards, upon the ground.

## CHAPTER III

### THE VOW FULFILLED

"CREES! Crees! Great Bear is slain!"

The cry rang out in a wild scream as Black Hawk flung himself upon the quivering body of his father.

For a few moments the drunken uproar of the camp ceased and many of the Indians—dazed and wondering—hastened forward, hardly able to understand what had happened.

"Red Fox! His 'burning arrow' has slain my father!" the boy cried distractedly to those who were nearest to him. "Help me! Help me, O Crees, to save his life that is slipping away in that red stream!"

Aid was given to turn Great Bear upon his back, but it was plain to see that the old hunter's moments in this world would be but few. One or two of the more sober Indians asked questions as to what had taken place, but the boy's frantic words conveyed but little meaning to their befogged brains.

Then Black Hawk knelt upright and cried out bitterly:

"Great Bear is slain—at the hand of Red Fox. Is there no one who will avenge the death of a Cree? Are you cowards that you let the pale-face escape? Must I call upon the women to do the work of men? O squaws of the Crees, come quickly! Our men have become as quaking birds. Will you hide in the tents while the blood of Great Bear flows away?"

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Thus lashed to action at last, the men hastily turned to seek the author of the outrage, but when they looked they found that the buckboard still remained, while the trader had made good his escape.

"After the Red Fox, Crees. Seize him, and bring him back to punishment. Revenge! Revenge for the blood of a Cree!" were Black Hawk's words.

Stirred to some better understanding of what was required of them the Indians set off in pursuit. But the fumes of the fire-water were still in their veins, and the red man's cunning for the trail was absent. They disappeared into the bush in howling chase of the fugitive, but they fled in all directions—heedless of track or sound, while Black Hawk again bent over his father, making vain efforts to retain the life that was nearly spent.

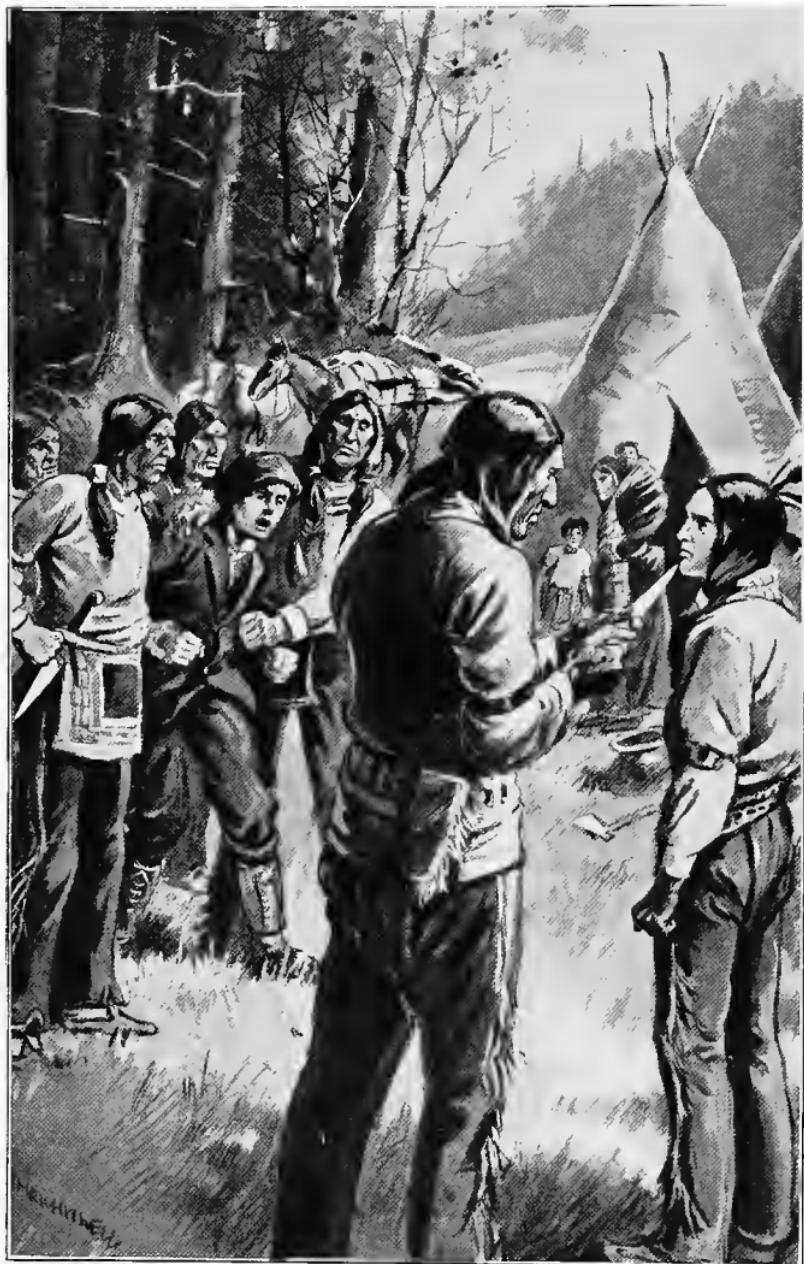
Presently a cry of joy was heard, and, when the boy looked up, he saw a number of men dragging a boy towards him—a white boy of about fourteen years of age.

"The Red Fox has gone," the Indians explained. "But he had hidden his papoose in the bushes while he traded with us, and we have found him—this son of evil."

The child was struggling violently, and his eyes were blazing with anger; but he was helpless in the strong hands that brought him to Black Hawk.

"Let me go!" the boy cried. "How dare you put your dirty hands on me? Ugh! I spit upon you, dogs!"

The words were brave, coming from lips so young, and from one in such a plight. But they did not restrain



"SHALL THE BLOOD OF THE WHITE PAPOOSE FLOW WITH THAT  
DRAWN BY RED FOX?"



the captors from bringing their victim to where Black Hawk knelt.

"He is the prey of Great Bear's son," said the Indians, and one, handing a bared hunting-knife, asked viciously: "Shall the blood of the white papoose flow with that drawn by Red Fox?"

Then Black Hawk's mind flashed back to the words of his father:

"If the hour ever comes when he can avenge his tribe, Black Hawk will not stay his hand? Black Hawk will promise?"

The boy remembered. His first thoughts had been those of pity for the boy. Now the remembrance of his vow on the hunting-knife drove all pity from his heart. He was the sufferer. By Indian justice his was the right to decide upon the punishment. and so he uttered those three words that sealed the boy's doom:

"Let him burn!"

The sentence was received with shouts of approval, which soon became a general chorus as other Indians returned from a fruitless search, and as the women, bearing torches, came to discover the cause of this fresh excitement in the camp.

"Ha! It is good! Let the papoose be burned!" some of the braves ejaculated, approving the justice of the sentence.

Still struggling vainly, the boy was then dragged to a tree, to which he was quickly bound with rawhide thongs. The squaws excitedly dispersed to cut dry grass and the men to gather wood, and soon the helpless lad found himself in the centre of a great heap of fuel prepared for his torture and death. He was

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too frightened by this time to attempt to speak. By the light of the torches it could be seen that his face was deathly white.

It was a task very welcome to those Indians whose savage natures had been fully aroused by means of fire-water and recent circumstances. When the preparations were completed they formed themselves into a circle, prepared to perform a death dance around the poor victim of their vengeance. Then a woman brought a burning brand, which she handed to Black Hawk. To him fell the honour of lighting the pyre.

Quickly the Indian youth stepped forward and bent to ignite the fuel ; but his hand was stayed as a voice broke upon the tense silence of the moment :

"Wait, O Black Hawk ! The Red Fox has something to say to you. Wait ! "

The young Indian stood up and saw Reynolds roughly pushing his way through the circle of onlookers, and advancing steadily towards the place of vengeance. So steadily did he advance, and so surprised were all at his sudden appearance, that not a single hand was stretched out to stop him, and not a single voice was raised in protest as he drew his knife, calmly slashed the cords that bound his son, and then took the lad's place with his back against the tree.

Then Red Fox raised his eyes, looked steadfastly upon Black Hawk, and spoke in a voice so different from its former coarseness that the listening Indians could hardly believe that they heard aright.

"Black Hawk ! You have justice on your side. I killed your father and the white man's law allows a life for a life. But if I live what sun will there

be then for me if my only son is gone ? I am a bad man ; but my boy loves me, and I love him. Let him be free, and let the Cree vengeance be satisfied with me. See ! I will not move nor say one word while the flames leap around me. But—you will be kind to the white boy when I am gone ? Use the torch quickly, Black Hawk ! Then Red Fox—and Fire-water—will trouble the Crees no more."

As the last word faded to a whisper the white boy seemed to realize the tragedy that was about to take place. He started like one suddenly awakened from a dream and turned to his father with a piteous cry :

" Dad ! Dad ! "

But the trader held up a hand to keep the boy from advancing.

" No, sonny. You must be brave," he said. " Don't come here, for—I am—unclean. Go to Black Hawk. He will be—a big brother—to you. Go ! "

Then the man braced himself and spoke almost angrily.

" Now, Black Hawk, do your work quickly, and be kind ! "

But the lighted brand had fallen from the Indian boy's hand. He turned to look upon the outstretched figure of his father : then he turned to face the trader, and he spoke with strange softness in his voice :

" There will be little sun to shine upon Black Hawk now that Great Bear has gone. It is not good that another should have to suffer as he. Go, Red Fox ! Take your papoose, and go in peace. The Crees know how to find revenge in forgiveness. Let there be peace between the red men and their white brothers."

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And the head of Red Fox was seen to sink forward upon his breast ; and tears flowed down the rough face of Red Fox.

Chief Fire-water came no more to the tents of the Crees.

# A REDSKIN FATHER CHRISTMAS

## CHAPTER I

### THE TRUST

NIGHT falls rapidly upon the prairie during the time of winter, and when the moon "sleeps within her tepee" (as the Indians say) then the sky is as dark as the blackest velvet, and the snow seems to dazzle one's eyes so that they only see as if in a mist.

It was quickly approaching such pitchy gloom when Grey Eagle and his attendant brave, Charka, reached the fringe of Badger Bluff. No Indian cares to travel by night. If possible he crouches by the fire within his tightly closed tepee. But if travel prevents such comfort, he lights a fire and sits huddled in his robes—wide awake—until morning. For, are not Onk-te-gee (the underground spirit) and his legions of evil free to come and go as they please when the Sun-god is not present to put fear into their hearts?

As the trail led into the shadows of the snow-laden pines, Grey Eagle reined in his pony and allowed Charka to reach his side.

"Here we should rest, O son of Tashunka, did we not hold the trust of Beautiful Dawn—the pale-face squaw of Great Medicine."

"Kind was she to the chief's papoose when the angry bear had torn his flesh," returned the young man. "For this did the Hunkpapa people make great

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promise that they would always do the bidding of Beautiful Dawn——”

“ Ready to pour out our blood upon the prairie,” completed the chief. “ It is good. We must ride through the night, for, by another sun, this treasure that I hold must be placed in the hands of the white friends of Beautiful Dawn.”

As the chief of the Hunkpapas (a tribe of the Sioux) spoke, his left hand pressed upon a bulky package which, wrapped in the folds of his blanket robe, was carried in front of him. His lips smiled with satisfaction as he thus reassured himself of the safety of the treasure.

“ Good,” he said. “ For many suns my little papoose shall live until he become a strong brave to slay the great bear. Thus shall he have vengeance with his own hands.”

“ Beautiful Dawn gave the papoose his life,” said Charka.

“ So the Hunkpapas will ever do her bidding.” Grey Eagle answered, in a deep tone that was a vow. Then he spoke, as though he were repeating a lesson : “ What were the words that Beautiful Dawn spoke ? —‘ By another sun, comes the great day that the pale-face calls Christmas. You will take this package from me to the white man named Hamilton. You will carry it with care, O chief of the Hunkpapas.’ ”

“ Then did I answer : ‘ Good. Beautiful Dawn speaks : the Hunkpapas obey. Is the package great medicine ? ’ Then did Beautiful Dawn laugh like a bird that sings, and she spoke : ‘ Oh, it is great medicine to the white men ! Glad will they be when they see it ? But the night darkens, son of Tashunka.

We must ride. Soon will we reach the Hunkpapa camp. There we will eat and rest in the tepee, and ride to the pale-face, Hamilton, when the new sun awakes."

Looking nervously from left to right as they plunged among the great snow-burdened plumes of the fir trees, the riders set forward at a gentle amble in Indian file.

Presently Grey Eagle's pony started and swerved to the left side of the trail. The chief gripped tightly with his knees, and pulled the rein to return to the centre of the path. But the animal pricked forward her ears and snorted in a startled manner as a dark object trotted across the trail a little distance ahead.

"Blood Wolf!" muttered the chief briefly, meaning the northern "timber wolf," called "blood" by the red men, since it is the fiercest of its kind.

"He runs slow—he is not afraid!" whispered Charka.

"Huh! Like the Chippewas he is brave when he is many and his enemies are few," said Grey Eagle grimly. "Behold!"

Bending forward over his pony's neck, Grey Eagle pointed straight in front of him, and there—in the darkness that hid the distant trail—could be seen a number of bright specks of light that flickered like so many points of fire.

The muscles of each pony twitched nervously. But they trusted too faithfully in their masters to show any other signs of fear in the face of danger. A sudden fright might alarm, but a known enemy was to be faced with confidence.

The Indians glanced around.

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The moving lights of those many eyes seemed to be visible in every direction—on the trail before and behind ; in the bush on either side.

These seasoned hunters well knew that those points of light meant timber wolves.

“ The northern snows have driven food from the plains. It has been bad hunting for the red men, and bad hunting for the blood wolves.”

“ So they came to steal the little that is left in the hunting-grounds of the Hunkpapas,” rejoined the chief. Then he laughed carelessly.

“ Let us take count of the noble tribe of blood wolves, O son of Tashunka ! ”

Plucking off his blanket robe, Grey Eagle quickly twisted it into a ball and flung it into the bush to the right.

Immediately the forest echoed with yelps and howls as a horde of wolves poured from all directions towards the spot where the blanket had fallen. The forest seemed to be alive with these vicious creatures that hunt in packs but fight and kill one another for possession of the prey. Nay, when one of their number is wounded—they instantly fall upon the helpless one and feast like cannibals upon their brother’s flesh.

A smile of satisfaction came over the chief’s face as he noted the success of his ruse, which had had two objects—one, to decide the number of the enemy ; the other, to draw them from the path.

“ The tribe has many fighters. They are as many as the stars,” was his comment.

But Grey Eagle knew that the freedom of the trail would not last for long. Soon the wolves would

tire of fighting among themselves, at which time they would again pick up the human scent.

"It is not good to wait here for the welcome of the blood wolves. They smoke no peace pipe," he said. "Come, O son of Tashunka! We may not make successful war with a tribe so hungry that they devour their own people."

Grey Eagle tightened the grip of his arm on the precious wooden box that had been entrusted to him. Then he pressed his knees firmly into the flanks of his pony. She understood the signal, and leaped into a gallop, in which she was closely followed by the equally fleet animal which Charka bestrode.

## CHAPTER II

### THE DANGER TRAIL

A HOWL from the timber wolves told the fugitives that their flight had been discovered. The subsequent "hunting trail" yelps informed them that they were already being hotly pursued.

Under ordinary circumstances, on the open prairie, there would have been no need for alarm on the part of the riders. But on this occasion the horses were not able to make the best use of their limbs. The trail twined through the thick bush in such a way that to gallop was impossible. Consequently, it was not long before the leading wolves were close to the riders.

"Charka! Throw blanket!" called Grey Eagle.

The order was instantly obeyed. Just as the chief had done, so did Charka slip his blanket from his shoulders and cast it into the bush.

Once again the ruse was successful, while the wolves worried the cloth—and one another.

But there was one of the old hunters who was not so easily deceived. Or perhaps he had determined that only human blood would satisfy him. He sprang out from the bush and snapped viciously at Grey Eagle's right leg, though he only succeeded in tearing away a portion of the leather legging. But he did not take his little prize without paying interest, for, as he leaped, the chief swiftly bent down and swung his long hunting-knife—the only weapon that he carried. The steel fang was more successful than the tooth of ivory. The wolf fell howling to

the ground, only to be immediately torn to pieces by his ravenous kind.

Onwards the riders pressed as the trail took its serpent way among the pines and hemlocks. The wolves had, for the time, been left behind quarrelling, and Charka took the opportunity to ride alongside his chief while, pointing to the little box, he said :

"Would it not be good to throw that also to the blood wolves ? Beautiful Dawn would not wish the chief of the Hunkpapas to give his life for so little ! "

Grey Eagle's answer was instant.

He uttered a single word of command that brought his pony to a sudden halt. At the moment of stopping he bent sideways and held the point of his long knife close to Charka's breast, as he demanded fiercely :

"Does the son of Tashunka bid the chief of the Hunkpapas to be false to the friends who trust him ? "

Charka was a brave. His eyes looked down upon the shining face of the blade, where the frozen blood of the wolf still remained. But he did not move ; his face did not even wince at the anger of his chief.

"She whom the red man calls Beautiful Dawn does not ask that blood be spilled in her service," the young man answered.

"Those words are true," the chief returned firmly. Then he raised his voice as though appealing to the very trees for an answer :

"Is there a brave with the blood of the Hunkpapas in his veins who would not gladly spill his blood to obey the wishes of her who is called Beautiful Dawn ? Show me such a dog, and my own hand shall drive this knife to the hilt in his breast ! Is the son of Tashunka answered ? "

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Charka bent his head in acknowledgment of the question.

"The father of the Hunkpapas speaks. It is for all men to obey his words," he said.

"Good," rejoined Grey Eagle as he withdrew the threatening blade. "Then listen, O son of him who never was afraid. Soon the blood wolves will again take the hunting-trail. Behold! I see them even now hiding in the bush! But the trust of Beautiful Dawn must be fulfilled. Are my words understood?"

"The chief's words are as the light of morning," replied Charka, and Grey Eagle continued:

"Then hark! Here we wait by a forked trail. One path leads on to the camp of our people; the other turns sharply over clear ground. You will follow the straight path; I will take that which lets a horse travel with speed. Thus will the wolves divide their tribe on two trails, and—one of us may live to tell Beautiful Dawn that the Hunkpapas tried to keep their promise."

The meaning of the chief's words were not lost upon the ready understanding of the young brave. At first thought it might have seemed that Grey Eagle had chosen the safer way for himself. The straight trail would be followed by most of the wolves; the open way would enable the pony to outstrip the few that pursued.

But the Indian reads words that are thought as well as those that are spoken, and Charka's self-control was broken when he heard the chief's commands.

"O father!" he exclaimed in agitation; "have

you forgotten that the clear trail leads through the hunting-grounds of the vengeful Crows? Have they not uncovered the tomahawk and sworn death to Grey Eagle? Let Charka take the open way! What matter if he fall by the hands of Red Thunder? Grey Eagle must live!"

"Huh!"

That single utterance came from the chief's throat with a sound of contempt that words cannot describe. "Shall it be said that Grey Eagle turned aside in fear of Red Thunder, of the thieving Crows?"

"But Charka would rejoice to——"

"Go!" commanded the chief loudly, as he pointed onwards with his hunting-knife. "That is the way that Charka shall take. Grey Eagle chooses his own path. Go!—ah, the blood wolves are again following. Ride swiftly, O son of Tashunka, who was never afraid. They will not follow further when they scent the red man's tepee. Go!"

Hearing the wolves once more close at hand Charka immediately set his pony at the gallop. Grey Eagle set off to the left, where the ground was almost clear of trees for half a mile or so.

So far the plan succeeded. Most of the pack chased wildly on the straight path, though a few picked up the other scent and tried to follow where the chief had ridden.

But was Grey Eagle only escaping from one wolf to face another?

For some months the Crows and the Hunkpapas had been at deadly enmity. The hunting season had been a bad one, and the Crows had sought to supply their needs by stealing cattle from a woman

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who had been left a widow with only a small farm to support herself and three young boys. It was she whom the Hunkpapas had named "Beautiful Dawn." Being almost unprotected, she would have lost all her stock had not Grey Eagle and his people come to her aid and stayed the hands of the Crows.

Deprived of their spoil, Red Thunder (the Crow Chief) had vowed vengeance. He would not openly attack his enemy in their numbers, but more than one solitary hunter had staggered into the Hunkpapa camp wounded by shots fired from ambush.

Thus did Grey Eagle find himself "between two fires." Of course he might dismount and avoid the Crow camp by taking to the bush. That would be simply giving himself into the jaws of the wolves. On the other hand, the revengeful Crows would be little better than wolves if the object of their hatred came easily within their clutches.

Grey Eagle chose the latter chance. He urged his pony to her utmost speed, and when the trail again entered the bush he dashed straight into the village of Crow tepees.

## CHAPTER III

### WHEN CHIEF MEETS CHIEF

THE barking of dogs announced the rider's coming. Hastily the Indians robed themselves and raised the flaps of the tents to discover the midnight visitor.

As Grey Eagle galloped a group of men spread themselves across his path, and one—a man of enormous build—stepped forward. The light from the fires within the tents only half revealed his face, but it needed little light to show features as brutal as any human being could well possess.

"Who rides so fast in the darkness through the tents of the Crows?" this Indian demanded in the tone of a savage bully.

Grey Eagle needed no second glance to tell him that the speaker was none other than Red Thunder. He halted his pony, and stretched out his right arm with the Sioux sign of peace.

"He who disturbs the rest of the Crows is one who is pursued by blood wolves," the chief answered. "He comes in peace."

"Grey Eagle!" cried the Crow chief, recognizing the speaker at once.

"Even so. Grey Eagle—chief of the Hunkpapas," was the quiet, though proud, response.

Red Thunder muttered something to the men beside him, after which he again addressed the stranger.

"The chief of the Hunkpapas speaks in strange words. Peace? Has he forgotten that the axe

is no longer buried? Or—has he come perhaps, to beg mercy from the vengeance of the Crows?"

Then did Grey Eagle's pride let itself loose in a cry of indignant fury.

"Beg mercy?" he exclaimed in a voice that all the camp could hear. "The Hunkpapas beg mercy from the Crows? Sooner would they offer their throats to the blood-dripping jaws of wolves than seek a favour from the robbers of helpless women!"

A howl of rage greeted this bitter defiance. Red Thunder snatched a hunting-knife from its sheath and sprang forward with uplifted arm.

But the point of Grey Eagle's blade met him, and he stopped within a few inches of the steel.

"Is Red Thunder in haste to seek the Happy Hunting-grounds?" Grey Eagle laughed scornfully. "When the Hunkpapa lifts his arm he strikes."

Then the speaker's voice was lowered to a more peaceful tone as he continued:

"Listen, O chief of the Crows! I ride to-night bearing great medicine from Beautiful Dawn to her white brothers by the Silver Waters. Shall I not pass through your camp as the stranger? Do not all the red men give a peaceful path to strangers who come neither to hunt nor to fight? Is not that the red man's law?"

"He is afraid! The chief of the Hunkpapas fears the Crows!"

Such were the comments of some of the onlookers.

Grey Eagle drew himself up with proud determination as he heard the sneers. He had tried the ways of peace. Well, if they must have war, so be it. Slowly he descended from his pony. He still held

the treasured box in the hollow of his left arm, and his right hand gripped the naked hunting-knife.

Then he faced Red Thunder and the Crow braves.

"The chief of the Hunkpapas comes in peace," he said. "If the Crows have forsaken the honour of the red men, and would turn peace into war—thus let it be. Will Red Thunder's braves stand aside while he tries his courage with Grey Eagle alone? Grey Eagle fights only with one arm; the other must protect the great medicine of Beautiful Dawn."

The answer to the challenge was immediate. But there was no real bravery on Red Thunder's part. The taunt had stung him to reckless anger. So, uttering a cry of rage, he sprang upon his enemy, hoping to end the quarrel with one thrust of his knife.

Grey Eagle quietly stepped to one side. Red Thunder staggered past him, being carried forward by the force of his own attack.

Then the onlookers were roused to anger. They wanted blood, and they were furious at seeing Grey Eagle play with their champion.

"Kill the dog of a Hunkpapa!" they cried.

Grey Eagle heard, but he gave no sign of hearing. His eyes were fixed upon his enemy, who had crouched low upon the snow, like an animal about to spring.

"Grey Eagle!" the chief of the Crows snarled, "this night shall the vengeance of my people be satisfied!"

"Red Thunder, from this night the prairie shall cry shame upon the Crows to have deserted the honour of the red man," said the Hunkpapa with calm bitterness. "Strike, O brave Crow chief! Are your claws bent that they can wound no longer? Is there no

papoose in the tents of the women who will take the place of a cattle thief ? ”

Driven desperate by the repeated taunts, Red Thunder again jumped forward. He missed his aim, but the point of the knife grazed the upper part of the arm that held the box.

“ Ha ! Good ! Red Thunder tastes blood ! ” cried the nearest onlooker, and the braves yelled with joy as though victory were complete.

Grey Eagle laughed loudly.

“ Good ! Good ! Now do I understand. I thought that I did but hear a little thunder in the distance. Now I know that, while one thunders, another must bring the lightning ! See ! It has come, Red Thunder ! ”

With the swiftness of a lightning flash Grey Eagle stepped to one side, then bent his body to the right, and, with one swift thrust, drove his knife clean through Red Thunder’s right shoulder.

The Crow chief fell backwards, crying in terror :

“ Braves ! Braves ! Your chief is slain by a dog Hunkpapa ! Vengeance ! Seize him ! Torture him with fire ! ”

The blood-lust was strong. Uttering the terrible war-whoops of their people, the assembled Indians rushed eager to avenge their chief.

Grey Eagle looked quickly around him. His pony had remained where he had left her. One spring and the chief was astride the faithful creature ; one word and she was dashing straight through the thickest of the crowd.

Arms were raised to strike with knives and hatchets, but the Indians were jostling one another in their

excitement, and the pony had ploughed her path before a single blow could be struck.

A tomahawk was thrown. It gashed the chief's forehead, and almost blinded him with the gush of blood. But he still clutched his precious box and urged his pony to greater speed.

"On, my little bird! On!" said Grey Eagle, bending forward to speak nearer to the faithful creature's ear. "Can the Crow outstrip the hawk's wing in its flight?"

The pony heard, and understood, for she scattered the powdery snow from her feet like spray from the crests of a stormy sea.

## CHAPTER IV

### FATHER CHRISTMAS

TON HAMILTON tumbled out of bed at dawn, and his first job was to light the cooking-stove, while he called his brother, who slept in the next apartment of the two-roomed shanty.

"Turn out, Bob! It'll be grub time in ten minutes. A merry Christmas to you!"

A yawn both loud and long, was the first answer to the summons. Then a sleepy voice exclaimed:

"Great Scott! I am as cold as ice! My breath has frozen the edge of the blanket to the collar of my pyjamas! I am afraid to move in case I break them."

"Don't worry about the blanket, but tumble out lively!" laughed the elder boy. "Can't you smell the grub? Ham and eggs and hot biscuits for a treat."

"Right you are," came the cheery answer from the next room. "I won't be long. But, say, isn't this Christmas Day?"

Again Tom laughed merrily. He was full of bright spirits on this their first Christmas morning in the West.

"Of course it is," he said. "Didn't I say 'Merry Christmas' to you five minutes ago?"

"Sorry, old chap," said Bob. "I didn't hear you. However, a merry Christmas to you!"

It was not long before the brothers were seated at breakfast, but they had hardly got half-way through

the meal when a voice from outside was heard calling faintly :

“ Ha ! *Nitchie !* ” (friend).

The lads jumped up in surprise at so early a visitor. They had heard no sound owing to the depth of the snow, which deadened all footsteps.

Tom threw open the door, and the sight that met their eyes was very far from what they had expected.

An Indian was facing them. His head was bound with a rough bandage of leather, which was stained with frozen blood, as was also his face and left arm. He wore no blanket. His leggings were torn, and he wore no head covering. Altogether he was a most pitiable spectacle, and he was evidently in the last stages of exhaustion. A pony (also drooping with weariness) stood beside him, and as the door opened the man smiled weakly as he held forward a smallish square box and muttered :

“ Good—Beautiful Dawn—great medicine for white brothers—Christmas ! ”

“ Why, it’s Grey Eagle ” exclaimed Tom Hamilton. “ Whatever has happened ? Where have you been, chief ? ”

“ Beautiful Dawn—trusted Grey Eagle,” the Indian replied falteringly, when Bob interrupted :

“ We’d better get him indoors, Tom. The poor chap is weak from loss of blood. Come, Grey Eagle ! Lean on me and we’ll have you all right in no time. You need some warm coffee and a rest.”

Muttering his thanks, the Indian allowed himself to be helped indoors. There he was placed in a chair, and Tom got hot water to dress the wound, while Bob supplied the warm drink.

## 150 A Redskin Father Christmas

"Phew! It's a nasty cut!" was the amateur nurse's verdict. "How did you come by it, Grey Eagle?"

"Beautiful Dawn—she give medicine for white brother, Hamilton. She say: 'Take to my white friends, for another sun is Christmas.' And Grey Eagle ride—blood wolves come—he fight Red Thunder to bring great medicine safely. Grey Eagle keep promise. White brothers will be glad to get box from Beautiful Dawn?"

"Very glad, thank you," replied Tom. He had completed the bandaging by this time, and was examining the outside of the box. "But I am sorry you had such a bad time. Better open the thing and see what is inside, Bob."

It did not take the younger boy more than a few moments to wrench off the lid. A card was inside. He picked it up and read aloud:

"From Mary Woodrow. Wishing you both a Merry Christmas."

"But what is the 'treasure' inside?" asked Tom.

While Grey Eagle watched the proceeding with eager eyes, Bob lifted out a parcel and tore off the paper wrappings.

"By hokey! A plum pudding!" he gasped, and soon the shanty was ringing with laughter.

"Is it—good medicine?" asked the chief.

"Rather! But it seems too bad that you had to go through all that fighting—just for a plum pudding."

"Grey Eagle keep his promise to Beautiful Dawn," responded the Indian, little understanding what Tom had meant. "He gave what the white man calls 'his word.'"

" You are jolly well right, chief," said Bob heartily.  
" Why, you have been a Father Christmas to us, and  
you'll stay with us and keep our first Christmas Day  
in the West. That so, Tom ? "

" You bet ! " answered Tom fervently, and he  
meant it.

## ALGY

### CHAPTER I

#### CATTLE RUSTLERS

THE little glade in the centre of Dixon's Bluff was a favourite Indian camping ground in the olden days. It still retains its popularity. Several big ranches occupy the country around, and so it is seldom that one can reach the Bluff without finding a cowboy on the "round up," camped there for a midday meal or a night's rest.

Bob Bittern and Dan Leary had been in the saddle since dawn, and now they were resting at the Bluff. The grass beneath the spruce gums was good, and the spring of water was plentiful; so they hobbled their animals and made a small fire by the side of the trail, while they discussed matters that were of deep interest to themselves as professional "cattle rustlers."

Presently Bob (best known in the West as "Hatchet Face"), who had been sitting in thoughtful silence for some time, began to knock the bowl of his pipe against his heel as he remarked grumbly:

"Look here, Dan. If something ain't done soon to put the fear of death into them Crow Valley boys, we might as well chuck our branding irons into the creek. Here we've promised a big consignment of steers to send down East in the autumn, and Earle has the fittest stock in Saskatchewan. How on earth we're going to fill the bill so long as he nurses his

beasts like a hen with her chickens, is more than I can tell. It ain't fair dealing, and that's a fact."

"What with his boundary riders and hunting dogs, an honest cattle rustler hasn't a chance of making a bare living," growled Leary. "It isn't as if the Crow Valley boss was an old Westerner that it would be an honour to be beaten by at the game. He's only a kid in arms, as you might say——"

"With dollars enough to buy up all the ranches in Rose Plain, they say. And he grudges us folk even a bunch of a hundred steers! Bah! The thought of his mean spirit makes me sick!"

Bob spoke viciously, and Dan grinned as he looked into the dark face of his companion, remarking slyly:

"They say that he has sure got his knife into you, Hatchet. They told me at the store last week that he swears he will sweep our whole outfit off the face of the prairie. Them's his very words: 'Off the face of the prairie.'"

"What for?" the other man demanded roughly. "Let the coon come to our ranch, and welcome." What'll he find there? Four peaceable bull-punchers busy at their job! It'll take more than a dude like Mister William Earle to find our cattle cache—a trail in the bed of Mint Creek that leaves no tracks and a snug little hollow in the side of the valley that can't be reached except from that same water. The Indians knew something when they made that place a burrow to hide in. Even the half-breed trackers couldn't find Sitting Bull while he hid there for two years. I guess no William Earle—nor his scouts, either—are going to find our little stock-in-trade in that cache. Sweep me off the prairie!"

"I guess it'll take a mighty lot of that same sweeping to clean up us boys."

"You can just bet your bottom dollar on that!" said Bob determinedly. "What's more—he can just make up his mind that this coon is going to corral all them fat steers—the whole hundred of them—before he's done. You mark my words, Dan. Before the dude is a week older—we're going to have the whole derned bunch!"

"With all his boys on the watch?" questioned Leary.

"With every mother's son of them wearing telescopes for eyes!" Bittern answered doggedly. "I'm not going to be done out of my job by a tenderfoot that hasn't grown enough whiskers yet to pad a pin-cushion."

"By all the tales, he must have a couple of thousand head all told," the other cowboy commented, to which Bob returned, with rising spirits:

"That's just it. With all his boundary riders, as he calls them, he can't keep an eye on the whole outfit day and night—feeding, as they are, on the open prairie. We've only to keep our eyes well skinned."

Dan gave a grunt that was expressive of much doubt as to the success of the enterprise.

"That's right enough, Hatchet," he said. "It may not be so easy to keep an eye on all the cattle, but it's dog simple to keep an eye on you and me. It don't take no telescope to pick out the cut of your figure on the prairie five mile away. Our gang is suspicioned at sight. Let the track of one of our bronchos be found, then it's a case of all on the hunt —men and dogs. Oh, they get on my nerves, them

dogs ! It's treating us like wolves to set dogs on our trail ! That's not prairie ways ! ”

“ It ain't ; but it's his way. But we'll best him yet. Now, if we could only get hold of a fresh hand —some sort of innocent-looking coon that hadn't been seen in these parts before—— Moses ! What in all the creation of cats is this picture coming along the trail ? ”

As Hatchet Face suddenly interrupted his own discourse with the foregoing exclamation of utter amazement, he jumped to his feet. Dan let his pipe fall from between his yellow teeth, and gasped : “ For the land's sake ! ” which, in these parts, means everything that astonishment can contain. Next moment Bob had set the trees echoing with a roar of laughter, in which his companion joined—the latter fairly rolling on the ground with merriment.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BARGAIN

CERTAINLY the sight was one well calculated to surprise the "honest" cattle thieves.

A rider was approaching along the trail from the south. His horse—surely the only one of its kind—advanced at a slow, unsteady amble. It looked as if Nature had intended it to be black, but patches of hair were missing all over its body, as though it had been periodically nibbled by a horde of mice. Its mane and tail caused one immediately to think of the stuffing escaping from an ancient sofa; its ribs were like a garden fence, much the worse for wear; while its action resembled nothing so much as an old hobbled cow hastening for a corn patch.

As for the rider himself! Only the wildest of wild dreams could have pictured such a get-up.

He wore a felt hat the size of a baby cart wheel. A bright blue scarf was round the neck of a flaming red shirt. Leather cuffs were on his wrists; brand new "chaps" were on his legs; his feet were encased in high-heeled top boots, the latter being further ornamented with enormous silver spurs, having wheels like star-fishes. His Mexican saddle and bridle (also new-born) were heavily decorated with silver plates and studs, while a new lariat hung before him on the pommel. Not even a silver-plated gun was omitted to complete the vision. It was slung from a belt filled with cartridges.

"What a picture!" exclaimed Bob Bittern as the rider came closer into view.

"What a nightmare!" gasped Dan, when he found spare breath for speaking.

Hatchet Face promptly planted himself in the centre of the trail, whipped out his revolver, and fired three rapid shots in front of the decrepit charger.

But the broncho did not blink an eyelid. It took no more notice of the spluttering dust at its feet than if it had been the fussing of mosquitoes. It only stopped in its pace when the rider tightened rein.

"That was a silly thing to do!" remarked the stranger, in a thin voice of complaint. "You really ought to be more careful with firearms. You might hurt some person one of these days, you really might!"

Bob simply gasped with indignation.

"What!" he roared. "Did you say that I—might—hurt—some—person?"

"That was my remark," the stranger said quietly. He was not in the least disturbed, apparently, by the cattleman's anger. "It is always dangerous to play with firearms."

Hatchet Face could hardly believe that he had heard aright.

"Me—me playing with firearms!" he bellowed. "Great Scott! younker, do you know that I could shoot air-holes in the top of that beehive that you're wearing at a hundred yards!"

The stranger smiled politely.

"I do not doubt your word for a single moment," he returned. "At the same time, you seem to be very careless."

Bob took a few quick paces forward, gripped the

youth with both hands, jerked him from the saddle, and stood him on the trail. Then he looked down upon the lad with an expression of utter contempt, and addressed him with words that were a purposed insult.

"When I've got work to do, there's nothing very careless about me," he said. "I've got half a mind to tear every bit of them gaudy trappings from your little carcase, if I didn't think that you needed them to hold your bones together. Say, dude! what picture show have you escaped from?"

"Picture show?" repeated the lad in an innocent tone that set both the cattlemen laughing again. "I have nothing to do with vulgar picture shows. I came from the Old Country some time ago, and I bought this horse——"

"This what?" was the jeering interruption. "Here, Dan! Come and have a peep at this mangy doormat that the dude calls 'horse'! Son, you are sure a fine judge of cattle."

"No," returned the youth airily. "I cannot agree to that. I really know very little about cattle, but I flatter myself that I am a very fair judge of horses."

The cool confidence of the stranger completely overcame the bullying Hatchet Face, who for once found himself without a suitable response ready to his tongue. Meantime, Dan Leary had been walking around both horse and rider, inspecting the same with an elaborate show of interest.

"Say, but you're some dandy with your spurs and gun!" was his verdict. "Were you thinking of stopping long in the wild and woolly West?"

" My present intention is to become what I understand is called a 'bull-puncher,'" was the answer. " I wish to be a cowboy—breaking wild bronchos and—and all that sort of thing, you know."

Dan stared at the speaker as though he were facing a ghost.

" For the land's sake! You'll sure make some cowboy!"

" The kid has come straight out of one of them penny bloods," commented Bittern. " You'll sure be no end of a bull-puncher with all that leather and hardware."

The youth smiled with pride as he looked down upon his wonderful leg casings, and glanced at the gay saddle.

" I selected my outfit with the greatest of care," he said. Then he added, as an afterthought : " The people of Mr. Earle's estate have been quite flattering in their praise."

At this mention of the name of his enemy, Bittern instantly began to sit up and take notice. He raised his eyes inquisitorily, and asked cautiously :

" You've been staying at Crow Valley? Friend of Earle?"

The youth shook his head.

" I shouldn't exactly call myself ' friend,' for, of course, I am only one of the fellows on his place. But there is no doubt he thinks a lot of me. I am one of the Crow Valley boundary riders!"

To say that this announcement was a fresh cause for astonishment on the part of the cattlemen would be to express the matter very mildly. They had both a very poor opinion of the "dude rancher," though

they had never seen him, and had only formed their opinions from hearsay. They knew him to be a fellow of pluck and enterprise, and they had secret admiration for his ability as a rancher, even though they were opposed to him in the matter of "doing business." Consequently, they were more than merely astonished when they heard that so efficient a stockman would tolerate on his ranch a freak cowboy like this.

"Crow Valley must be a fine place if it has many more penny bloods like you," Bob at last remarked sarcastically. "By the way, younker, what do they call you at home?"

"Algernon is my name," the youth frankly imparted. "But my friends usually call me 'Algy.' I prefer Algy, don't you? It sounds much more friendly than Algernon."

"It does," answered Bob. "So we'll call you 'Penny Blood Algy' for friendliness. An' my name is 'Hatchet Face'; my partner goes by the name of 'Hot Iron' in these parts. He is used to handling red-hot irons quicker than any other man on the plains. That's how he came by his name."

"How interesting. I suppose his business is something in the blacksmithing line," commented the boy, to which Bittern assented with rough humour:

"Right, first go. Handling a hot brand to change the alphabet is his line, ain't it, Dan?"

The other man, thus addressed, did not seem to be too pleased to hear his profession published so freely, and he whispered hoarsely to his companion while the stranger had turned to remove some of the dust from his beautiful saddle.

"Ease off, Hatchet. We don't want the kid to go blabbing about you and me."

But Hatchet Face laughed at the suggestion.

"Bah! The young innocent doesn't know the meaning of it. Besides, he's not the sort to go blabbing of what he hears honest men talk, are you, Penny Blood?"

"To tell tales, you mean?" questioned the boy.  
"Rather not. Why, I know ever so many secrets about Crow Valley, and nothing in the world would make me tell them to anybody. Why" (here the speaker drew himself up and tried to look very important), "I came out here to make my fortune, and I cannot expect to do that if I am not a man who is to be trusted."

"Do you seem like making that fortune? Any signs of it on the horizon?" questioned Dan.

"Not yet, Mr. Hot Iron," was the reply. "You cannot expect a man to make his fortune all at once. But—I am earning something. I am in charge of Mr. Earle's new herd of fat steers, and I am to get a commission on them if they are in good condition when they are sold."

On receiving this information the cowboys exchanged glances. They were on the alert for news that would help them in their unlawful trade. A few quick and eager whispers passed between the two men, and then Bittern turned and heartily clapped a hand on Algy's shoulder.

"Look here! I like you, Penny Blood!" he said.  
"You've got the makings of a slap-up bull-puncher in you. Hasn't he, Iron?"

"Not a doubt about it," agreed Dan with a grin

that was intended to express the utmost admiration.  
“Now, if I had a kid of my own, I’d like him to grow up to be just such another as our friend here.”

“Same here,” rejoined Bittern. “But since we ain’t got no kids of our own, what’s to keep us from doing a good turn to a deserving one that isn’t our own, eh? Tell me that, Iron?”

“Nothing in the world,” Dan answered devoutly.

“And so, Penny Blood,” the other man resumed, “it’s mighty lucky that we tumbled across you this morning. You see, it so happens that we have just bought that same bunch of steers that you were talking about—bought them a week ago. Mr. Earle—he’s an old friend of ours——”

“A real bosom pal, as one might say,” added Dan, and Algy smiled with pleasure at the information, saying:

“I am very glad, indeed, to have the pleasure of meeting you, gentlemen—especially since you are friends of Mr. Earle. But what do you mean by saying that it is lucky we have met?”

“Well, it’s like this,” Bob proceeded to explain. “You see, when my partner and me bought them steers, we paid a deposit on the deal and agreed to fetch the cattle away to-day. If we don’t fetch them, the deal is off and the deposit lost. See?”

“Then the simple thing to do is to bring them away at once,” the youth remarked, but Hatchet Face immediately proceeded to explain the impossibility of so doing.

“That is, of course, the right thing to do,” he agreed. “But we are busy people, Iron and me. We have another deal elsewhere—a mighty big

business elsewhere, and it must be fixed up at once if we are not to lose the chance of making thousands. And we can't be in two places at once, now can we?"

"Quite impossible," Algy assented.

"And so," the former continued, "I was just wondering if we could not do you a good turn, and do ourselves one at the same time. We can't afford to miss the chance of doing the big deal nor to lose on the deal with Earle."

The boy nodded.

"I think I understand. You want someone to bring away the herd for you from Mr. Earle's place."

"Right," said Bittern. "You've got a heap of brains under that hat. By the way, what commission was you expecting from Earle?"

"Ten per cent on the whole business."

"Ten per cent?" the cowboy repeated in amazement. "Why, sonny, he's doing you all ends down! He is a clever coon, is that same Earle, but he is hard when it comes to business—mighty hard. That is just what's bothering us. Now you'll hardly believe it when I tell you that if we don't turn up to take away that herd, Earle will call the deal off, and pocket the deposit, and sell the steers elsewhere. And he won't let anyone else take them away but ourselves. That's the sort of man he is—very nice to talk to you in a homely way, but hard as nuts when it comes to trade. But ten per cent! Man, it ought to be twenty at the very least. They do take it out of a tenderfoot, don't they, Iron?"

Thus appealed to, Dan of course agreed with the opinion of his partner.

"If it had been one of our own hands (if we had

any, which we haven't), and he had been selling for us, twenty per cent would never have been spoken about. Thirty would have been nearer the mark," he said.

Having considered that Algy's brain had now been brought to the position of appreciating the chief point of the plot, Bittern bent close to the lad, and lowered his voice to speak in a tone of friendly confidence.

" See here," he said. " I'll tell you what I'll do. If you will bring that bunch to me to-night I'll hand you over a clean two hundred dollars for your trouble. Talk of making your fortune ! Why, it'll be easy money, and—the beginning of more if you bring it off well. What do you think of that ? Two hundred, in addition to what Earle will hand over. Is it a bargain ? "

" I'll ask Mr. Earle," began Algy, when Bittern interrupted with horror at the very suggestion.

" Ask him ! That would fix everything. You'd lose his commission and our two hundred. He'd be mighty glad of a chance to pocket my deposit, and sell to another rancher. No, no, P.B. Not a word to him. All you have to do is to round up the bunch about dusk. Run them along this trail for about a mile farther. Then you'll come to where the track branches off to the left, down into Mink Creek. Follow that right down to the crossing. We'll be there to meet you, and, when the steers are corralled, the two hundred dollars are yours. What about it, now ? "

" I am your man, Mr. Hatchet Face," was the enthusiastic reply. " My hand on it ! And—it will be a dead secret. Earle will just think that you came and took away your own stock."

"Good! That's the kind of lad we want in the West," said Bob, as he returned the hand grip heartily.  
"We could do with a heap more like Penny Blood Algy, couldn't we, Iron?"

"Heaps of them—herds of them! Penny Blood is the real goods."

"That is all right," said Algy modestly. "I will be at the Creek with the herd, as arranged." Then the youth turned and clambered upon the saddle like an old woman ascending a steep step-ladder. But the horse was steady. An earthquake would not have moved it. The rider was also persevering, and he ultimately accomplished his aim, picked up the reins, and raised his hat politely, saying:

"Good-bye for the present, gentlemen!"

"Good-bye!" returned the men, who were hardly able to restrain themselves from laughter at the comical scene.

"To-night—Mink Creek, at dusk!" Bittern reminded.

"Make no mistake, I'll be there. You'll have good reason to remember Penny Blood Algy after to-night," laughed the boy, as he set his wonderful steed ambling along the trail.

"Now I'd like to know just what the coon meant by that remark," muttered Bob Bittern.

"Swank—just swank," answered Dan, as he turned to saddle-up his broncho.

## CHAPTER III

### ALGY KEEPS HIS PROMISE

THE two cattlemen were ready for the appointment at the river crossing in good time that night. As they lurked on their horses among the shadows of the bush, Hatchet Face could hardly refrain from laughing aloud at the thought of the simplicity with which he was to outwit Earle and his boundary riders.

"It is just like picking up dollars from the grass," he remarked to Dan. "Who would ever have believed that they could make a tenderfoot so tender and green as our friend Penny Blood?"

"There he comes over the brow of the valley—as calm as you please!" interjected Leary, pointing towards the slope where, in the gathering gloom, a rider could be seen following at the tail of a small herd. "He's got them sure enough."

"Sure, it's just a picnic!" laughed Bittern. "The Crow Valley boys are going to sweep me off the face of the prairie, are they? And here's one of the outfit steering all them bullocks right into my very arms. Man alive! it's a regular picnic, this is!"

"Does Penny Blood have any particular share in this—picnic?" questioned Hot Iron, though he had a fairly good idea of what the answer would be.

"Him? His share will be to help us to get the steers quiet up the river, and then—— Well, I guess one tap from the butt of my old Colt will end his Wild West days for him. There won't be many who will

be very anxious to discover his whereabouts, I'm thinking."

Dan muttered something that sounded like approval of this kindly purpose, and then said :

" The herd is quiet. They are keeping close, so there will be no trouble in getting them to keep to the bed of the creek. I guess we'd better show ourselves now."

The plotters rode forward. Algy soon saw them, and called out cheerfully :

" You see, I have kept my promise."

" Good for you ! " replied Hatchet Face. " But it will be just as well not to speak too loud. It might—well, it might frighten the cattle. Cattle is easy scared at this time of night. They might stampede, and then all your work would be done for nothing."

" That would be a pity, after all the trouble I have taken. Not that they have been much bother. They came like lambs. Is this where we leave them ? "

" Not quite," said Bob. " It is a little way yet. But the trail gets very bad across the creek. We always take them part of the way up the water. Dan, you go and give Penny Blood a hand, and I'll lead the way to give the cattle confidence. And keep the bunch on the move—steady, without hurrying."

So saying, the speaker led the way down the short dip to the crossing. The water was shallow, though swiftly running ; but the animals showed no inclination to be stubborn, and they followed the rider with but little necessary persuading.

The hour was dusk, but it was not dark enough to prevent those in the rear from plainly seeing the guide

as he slowly led the way along the twining course of the river-bed.

For some time the procession followed in silence, except for the splashing of water as the animals moved, and the occasional gentle lowing of one creature addressing his neighbour.

Presently Algy drew his horse close to Dan, and whispered in a slightly uncertain tone :

“ Is it—is it quite safe—here ? ”

Dan was not now in much mood to exert himself to be pleasant. The purpose of the night had been almost accomplished. That was all that interested him, and he answered the boy’s question with sharp gruffness :

“ Safe ? That depends on what you mean.”

“ I mean—wolves—and rattlesnakes—and things of that sort. Are there any about ? ”

“ Plenty,” was the sharp rejoinder. “ If you’re scared, you have a gun, haven’t you ? ”

The youth gave a sigh of relief.

“ Oh, thanks awfully ! ” he said, as he withdrew the weapon from its sling at his hip. “ I had quite forgotten. Of course, I can shoot if I am attacked—Ugh ! Bother the thing ! I’ve dropped it in the water ! ”

“ And a good job, too,” growled Dan. “ Let it rest. It’s safer in the creek. You’ll not be wanting it.”

“ Oh, indeed I shall ! ” expostulated the boy. “ I wouldn’t lose it for anything. It may be needed to save my life yet. But don’t you wait, Mr. Hot Iron ! I’ll recover it, and be after you in a second.”

The boy pulled rein and slipped clumsily from his horse, and in a few moments Dan heard him announcing success.



"FOUND HIMSELF LOOKING INTO THE BARREL."



"I have found it! What luck! I don't suppose it will be any the worse for its bath."

Dan Leary did not take any notice of the interesting information. He was too intent upon the work of keeping the steers on the steady move to give any attention to a boy's foolishness.

Perhaps it might have been better in some ways if he had been a little more attentive to other matters. Had he not been urging along a laggard steer, he might have noticed that Algy did not regain his seat upon the old broncho with the same clumsy action as had been the cause of laughter that afternoon. He might also, perhaps, have noticed that, while he talked inane nonsense, the boy's fingers were shaking out the loop of a very supple and well-used lariat which had replaced the brand new article that previously hung at the pommel of the saddle.

As it was, Dan got the shock of his life when he heard Bob Bittern suddenly let loose a yell of terror, as a lariat settled round his arms and dragged him backwards.

When he did turn, and it was only a second later, Dan found himself looking into the barrel of a Colt's automatic—not the plated toy that had been purposely dropped, and left lying in the stream.

"Hands up, Dan Leary!" the boy commanded in a very different voice from his previous affected tones. "Hands up! I've got you and that other thief at last—and I mean to keep you, dead or alive!"

Up went Dan's hands without a second's delay.

"Now then, wheel round your broncho, and get back to the crossing. Don't worry about your partner; I've got him all right at the end of the

lasso, and my herd pony, Nick, can lug along a steer when the lariat is firm to the pummel. Look alive! If you try to play any tricks, you can bet your life I'll blow daylight through you!"

Hot Iron needed no further bidding. He knew when a man with a gun meant business, and he quickly urged his horse downstream while his captor followed—dragging behind him a stumbling, cursing cattleman whose arms were pinioned by the rawhide lariat.

Reaching the crossing, Dan led the way to the upper clearing. Here Algy called a halt.

"Now then, Dan, get your lasso!" he ordered. "Take it and tie up your friend Hatchet Face. You know as well as I do that honest men will take no risks with such scum as you. So—no games—or—"

It was needless to say more. Dan growled his anger, but he hastened to obey. Meantime, the boy slipped swiftly from his horse, which was a trained herder, and knew how to keep the lariat taut between herself and the captive. The slightest slackening of the strain on the pommel, and she would step forward to tighten the pull until her master gave the order that all was well.

"So far, so good," said Algy, when the trussing was completed to his satisfaction. Bob was firmly bound, but, acting under directions, Dan had left his legs free, for the prisoner would still have some distance to walk at the end of the lasso.

The boy next plucked the guns from both owners, and threw the weapons into the bush.

"You'll be better without these toys," he said. Then he again addressed Dan. "Get on your horse, and make a bee-line for Crow Valley. Don't go too

fast, or you will hang your partner, for I'll have to keep up with you, and my lariat won't break. Whatever you do, keep ahead of me, and don't try any tricks. You will find a warm welcome awaiting you at Crow Valley."

During these proceedings Hatchet Face had not uttered a word. He had been too dazed by the unceremonious dragging through the stream in the first place, and too dumbfounded by his capture in the second place. But at last his tongue was loosed, and he exclaimed :

" For the land's sake, boss, who are you ? "

" Don't you know ? " laughed the boy. " Did I not swear to sweep you off the face of the prairie ? I have kept my word. I am sorry that I had to snip poor Nick's coat to complete the picture of my pretty get-up, and it will take a lot of trouble to get the tar from her mane and tail. But it was worth it to catch you in the act of stealing my steers, and, what's more —to find out your secret cache ! Come on, Dan ! Time's up, and I want to be home for supper. I told you that you would have occasion to remember Penny Blood Algy, did I not ? "

" William Earle—the dude rancher ! " was all that Bob could say. He was humbled and done.

# THE LION OF THE DESERT

## CHAPTER I

### THROUGH THE DESERT

“**W**HOMO comes riding to the Bedouin tents without firing a friendly shot of welcome?”

The old Sheikh (chief) Yusef Hosein asked this question in a deep voice of suppressed anger, for it is a great neglect of desert manners to arrive at a Bedouin camp without shouts and firing. The old man was sitting in his tent with his family, enjoying the cool evening breeze that seemed to be coming over the desert in a straight line from where the sun was just setting in a blaze of gold and crimson.

As well as enjoying the cool of the evening, the Arab chief also seemed to get great pleasure in drawing smoke through the long tube that twined like a serpent from the crystal bowl of the water-pipe on the ground in front of him.

It is a good Arab custom that invites all who will to gather round wise old age at evening. Stories are told and songs are sung—mostly tales of love and warfare. Often these occasions are used for the settling of disputes in a homely fashion. The old men are thus in reality the fathers of their people. Their counsels are readily sought in all difficulties, and as readily obeyed.

On this occasion the telling of an old desert legend had been interrupted by the sound of a horse advancing

at the gallop, invoking the resentful question above quoted.

"Perhaps, O Sheikh of the Bedouins, it is but a frightened horse that has seen an evil spirit, and gallops to safety," suggested a young Arab, who was seated close to the chief's side.

The old man grunted contemptuously at the suggestion.

"For sixty years, O Shukri Ibrahim, have I dwelt on the desert whose face is to my eyes as the face of an old friend. For sixty years have I listened to the voice of this land whose words are as plain to me as the words of Gabriel spoken in the ear of the Prophet (whose name be blessed!). Had it pleased Allah the Most Merciful to take away my sight—yet it would not be that any sound of wind or beast or man could cheat my ears. The Bedouin sees as he hears, and hears as he sees."

"True, O Sheikh," returned the young Arab humbly. "Yet——"

"The horse has fallen—dead! The rider is stricken to the ground!" interrupted the chief with sudden vehemence, at the same time dropping the tube of his pipe and rising to his feet. "Let us hasten, O Shukri! I fear that all is not well."

Leading the rest of his people, who were now roused to a pitch of excitement, the old chief strode from the wide opening of the tent. Advancing a few paces, he stopped. A dark object was lying on the sand near at hand. To this the Arab pointed, as he remarked to Shukri with some little pride in his voice:

"Behold, O son of Achmed the Slayer! What does

that still body and outstretched neck tell thee? Is Yusef Hosein an old man in his dotage?"

Shukri placed his right hand on his breast and bowed his head in reverend respect.

"All the wisdom of the Bedouins is found in the words of Sheikh Yusef Hosein. He who says otherwise is as a brook that flows upon the sands and is lost. In the name of Allah the Compassionate, I bow to the dust."

The old man slightly inclined his head to acknowledge the compliment. Then he turned to where a small group of men and women were gathered outside a neighbouring tent, and he remarked in a tone of confident pleasantry:

"If all wisdom has not taken to itself the wings of an eagle, here we will find the stranger also. Come, my son."

Then as the young man drew closer the sheikh muttered in a voice of anxiety: "There is evil in the air to-night, O Shukri. I can scent it as the jackal scents his food. And it seemed to me just now that, as the wind passed among the tents, it whispered a name that has been long unspoken—'Ameen,' it seemed to say. What can it mean? This is not the hour when evil spirits are free to wander."

"No doubt it was but the wind, O Father of the Faithful," returned the young man. "Thy little son was swallowed by the desert these many years. (Peace be to his name!) Thy little Ameen is with the blessed."

The old chief laid a hand on his companion's arm.

"Thou speakest well. Perhaps it may be that the years are weighing heavier than I believed. But thou hast ever been a comfort to me, O Shukri Ibrahim.

Though thou art not of my blood, thou hast ever been a dear son to me. May the peace be with thee."

"And to thee, peace," returned the young Arab in the Mohammedan form of speech.

Hearing the sound of voices, one of the group which the sheikh was approaching turned, and, seeing his chief, displayed immediate anxiety to be the first to tell the strange news. This he did with customary excitement in voice and action.

"Welcome, O Father of the Poor! Now shall the truth of all things be made clear since thou hast come, O Sheikh of the Bedouins. O Most Blessed of the Prophet (whose name for ever be honoured!), thus, and in this way did it happen: Thy servants did sit in their tents to the enjoyment of sweet music, when from out the earth there suddenly sprang a horse and rider. Black were they—blacker than the raven of night. Then, lo! I beheld the horse outstretched before me. And there—right before the door of my tent lay an Inglisi boy."

"Inglisi boy? Is he also dead?" interrupted the sheikh sharply, at the same time darting a look towards Shukri Ibrahim, as if to say, "I told you what was happening!"

"The Inglisi boy is not dead, O Father of the Poor. But he lies like a stone."

"I will see him," said the sheikh, and he strode into the tent where the boy lay. As he gazed upon the face of the unconscious lad he started and a gleam came into his eyes.

"Remove him to my tent," he said. "It may be that Allah will yet spare his life."

The lad was removed and the sheikh's wife, at her

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husband's command, did all she could to restore the patient to consciousness. It was long before any improvement in the lad's helpless condition was apparent, but at last the continued efforts of the Arab woman began to take effect.

Slowly the boy opened his eyes, and looked before him with a vacant, dazed expression. But presently he moved his head as intelligence came back to him, and soon his lips parted with a smile as he turned to the woman attending him.

" You are very kind," he said quietly in the Arab tongue. " I don't know where I am, but—but I feel that I am—with friends. Is it not so ? "

" The Inglisi has spoken truly," replied the woman. " By the will of Allah he has been guided to safety—to the tent of my lord Yusef Hosein—the Sheikh of the Bedouins."

" Yusef Hosein ? " the boy repeated. Evidently the name conveyed to him nothing of fear. He uttered the words in a tone that implied that the name was not unknown to him, and that he was contented to be in such good hands. He had paused for a moment's thought on receiving the information as to his host ; then he added courteously :

" The name of Sheikh Yusef Hosein is well known for kindness on the desert. My father has often spoken of the justice and bravery of the Sheikh of the Bedouins."

" Even so," returned the woman. " People speak of my lord as the Lion of the Desert, for he slays all the doers of evil. To the Bedouins he is known as Yusef the Good."

During this conversation the chief had been sitting silent in his former position at the foot of the couch.

Seeing now that the boy was rapidly recovering strength, he slowly rose and signed a command for his wife to leave the tent. But there was something in the man's manner that caused the woman to hesitate. She had only just noticed the evil look in his eyes, and not understanding the meaning of the apparent anger, she glanced nervously at her master and the boy, as if trying to read from their faces that which was, as yet, hidden from her understanding.

Annoyed by the delay at obedience to his commands, the chief's eyes flashed angrily, and he again pointed to the entrance of the tent, saying fiercely :

" Go, woman ! Is it not my right to command ? "

" Even so, my lord, but—"

" Then thine is the duty to obey," was the rough response.

The woman bowed humbly.

" As my lord speaks, so does his servant obey," she answered softly. The woman glided from the tent, but only out of sight. She sensed danger—either to her husband or the boy—she did not know which. So she crouched on the sand just outside the tent so as to hear what took place within.

Being now alone, the Arab turned fiercely towards the boy, exclaiming in a hoarse undertone :

" Dog ! Son of a dog ! You are strong enough now to speak. Tell me what good fate brought the son of Hakeem Hannan to the Bedouin tents this night ? Speak ! "

The boy looked puzzled at the vicious words.

" Whether or not it be good fate, O Sheikh, I cannot say. But I knew not that I should come hither when I left Mosul after the midday meal."

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"Mosul?" exclaimed the Arab, surprise for the time being having set aside his anger. "That is a two days' journey by caravan——"

"Yet I have done it in a few hours," returned the boy. "O Sheikh, there have been terrible things in Mosul this day! This morning the Sultan's robber soldiers—the Hamideeyah—suddenly attacked our home, and many other homes of English people. They have killed many, and the streets were filled with the shrieking of the tortured."

"And thy father?" broke in the chief with an eagerness of tone that plainly told the pleasure that would be his if the death of the hakeem were confirmed. "Thy father? Was he also among the slain?"

"I pray that he may have been spared," replied the boy with signs of distress at the thought. "The Hamideeyah attacked our house; they killed all our servants, but they took my father and my little brother prisoners. My father bade me escape and ride to Jebel to friendly Arabs who would help us. But a sand storm came when I entered the desert. Then the heat and the dust must have brought fever, for I had no covering to my head. I can only remember riding—riding—on and on. Then all became darkness to me, and now——"

"Thou art here with those who are—*glad to see the light of thy face!*!" The old Bedouin chuckled viciously. Then he asked: "The Hamideeyah took thy father and thy brother? What way did they journey?"

"I watched, and saw them enter upon the road to Ain Ali."

Again the sheikh laughed grimly to himself.

"The road to Ain Ali? Allah is good. Thus does he reward the faithful. By now, the hakeem and his young child are sold as slaves who must work in the secret mines in the mountains. It is good—good. By the beard of the Prophet (whose name be blessed!) my vengeance is repaid—*nearly!*"

The meaning contained in the last word was unmistakable. A look, such as that of a trapped animal, flashed into the boy's face. He stared with questioning fear into the sheikh's eyes, but there he saw nothing that even glimmered of friendliness. That he was face to face with danger, he realized on the instant, and the strength of desperation thrilled his limbs. He started from the couch, breathing heavily, and faced the Bedouin with flashing eyes and clenched fists.

"What dost thou mean, O Sheikh?" he demanded. "Hast thou caught me in a trap—you whom I thought to be a friend?"

Dropping the friendly "thou," and adopting the "you" of a superior speaking to one beneath him in rank, the chief laughed as he answered the questions in his own way:

"When the jackal walks into a trap, do you blame the hunter? And do you blame the trap if it—*holds fast that which it has found?*" Then the man's anger broke loose. He spat upon the ground as he cried aloud:

"O Son of Scorpions! Who told you to come to the tent of Yusef Hosein? No doubt the same djin that sent the hakeem, your father, when he blinded the eyes of little Ameen—my only son."

Here the old man's voice was changed from that of

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angry scorn to a moan of distress, as he turned his face upwards and appealed to the heavens.

"Oh, my son—my son! Where art thou now? Blinded, thou wert driven out into the desert by night that the djin might take to themselves that which they had cursed. But the heart of the Bedouin must long for that which he is forbidden to long for. Would that I could have given my life for thine, my little son! Oh, Allah the Merciful—the Compassionate, have pity on the hunger of an old man's heart, and forgive his erring!"

The memories were bitter. These many years ago the child had been afflicted. Medical aid had been given. But the Bedouins had expected magic, not "treatment." And when the boy's eyes had not been instantly cured the Arabs had decided that an evil spirit had permanently blinded him. They deemed that the djin had claimed the infant, and must be obeyed. So they complied with superstitious custom. All diseased and deformed were "devil-branded," they thought, and, being such, were led out into the desert and left there. Such were soon lost. They became easy prey for wild beasts. The Bedouins believed that they had gone to the underground realms of the djin.

Yes, the sheikh's memories were bitter, for he had never forgotten his son, even though superstition had forced him to yield to custom. But his sadness quickly surged back into a wave of anger. Had not the English doctor put the spell of blindness upon the child? Was not the doctor's own son now within the power of vengeance?

"Dog! Son of a dog!" the Bedouin cried, using the worst of insulting words that an Arab knows.

" Shall my hand be stayed when my enemy is in my power ? "

The boy knew that he was in a desperate position, but he strove to keep his self-control so as to be ready for any emergency.

" Thou art wrong, O Sheikh," he returned quietly.  
" I am no enemy of thine."

The Arab laughed scornfully.

" By the eyes of the Inglisi, and by the colour of his face, he might even be one of us," he said. " Thus does the sun of the desert seek to make all men his own. But even the sun does not make evil ones as friends of the Bedouin ! Where is the magic that will change a hakeem djin into an angel ? "

" If you mean the hakeem, my father, O Sheikh, there is no need for change," returned the lad stoutly.  
" There is no better man in the East—no, not in all Mosul."

" The hakeem is not in Mosul now," rejoined the Arab with a sneer. " By now his back is scarred with the whips of his masters. Arabs and Turks always beat—dogs ! "

Hitherto the boy had bravely fought to restrain his temper, hoping that the sheikh's evil mood might change if allowed to vent itself unopposed with any strength. It is usually thus with those people of the desert. But the last taunt was more than the lad could bear.

" You lie, Sheikh ! " he cried in a burst of fury.  
" My father would die rather than be beaten by the scum of the desert ! "

And, without pause, the boy sprang like a young panther straight for the Bedouin's throat.

## CHAPTER III

### A STARTLING DISCOVERY

THE boy's attack, fierce though it was, might just as well have been a little wave directed against a cliff. Yusef Hosein was a giant in build, and a giant in strength. He met the onslaught with the alertness of the lion whose name he bore, and in a moment the boy found himself swung high in the air—gripped at arms' length by two hands of steel.

For an instant the sheikh held him thus, preparatory to dashing him to the ground with a force that would have maimed him for life, if it did not instantly kill him.

It seemed to the boy to be an hour that he waited for his fate. But the expected fate never came, for the sheikh's vengeance was stayed by the voice of a woman that rang out with shrill appealing :

" Oh, my lord, my lord ! Do not this shameful deed ! He has taken food in the tent of the Bedouin. Thus is he our brother to protect—not to slay ! Bring not this shame to the good name of the Bedouin ! "

Instantly the old man's arms were lowered. All anger melted from him, and he bent his head, defeated and ashamed. Even a sip of water is " food " in the Arab sense of the word, and the sharing of food in an Arab tent makes the sharer a blood brother, bound to his host with a tie that nothing dare break unless all respect and honour is to be forfeited by his tribe.

So the old man stood humiliated. Then presently

he raised his head to look upon the boy, who was now standing with his back half-turned to the chief.

"Allah is merciful," he muttered, half to himself, half to the lad. "Allah is kind in that the Bedouin's hand was stayed before a lasting shame was cast upon the honour of the desert—Y'Allah!"

The last word was a sudden cry of consternation—a cry so full and wild that Miriam startled with a terrified look, thinking that her husband had been attacked by madness.

The boy was also startled, but he was still more taken aback when the sheikh gripped him firmly with one hand, and calling upon his wife to look, pointed a trembling finger to where the stranger's shirt had fallen from the left shoulder.

"Look, O Miriam! Look! What dost thou see? Tell me quickly before I think that the djin are working evil with me also, and blinding my sight to see that which exists not. Speak, woman! Hast thou become dumb?"

Miriam bent forward. She, too, uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and then spoke in an undertone of awe:

"I see—the brand of a double star—the brand of a Bedouin of chiefly blood—the brand of the house, O my lord!"

"Speak, boy! Thy name?" demanded the chief impatiently, and trembling with excitement.

Utterly puzzled by this fresh turn of events, the lad replied readily enough:

"My name is 'Hannan.' That thou knowest well, O Sheikh of the Bedouins."

"But the Inglisi have many names," pressed

the old man. "By what other name art thou known?"

"By the Arab name—Ameen."

"Then," exclaimed the chief with a ring of wild joy in his voice—"then, O son, thou art——"

But the speaker's voice was then stifled, for Miriam had turned swiftly and placed both hands on the sheikh's mouth, at the same time whispering closely in his ear :

"Wait! Wait, O my Lord! Thou lovest thy son? For his happiness, listen to the counsel of Miriam, for he must never know what I, thy servant know."

"Thou, Miriam?"

The old man was obviously at a loss to understand the woman's mysterious hints, and he gazed upon her with wonder as she stood before him looking appealingly into his face.

"Thy servant hath done wrong, it may be," Miriam resumed, speaking rapidly, and still in whispers. "Come aside with me a little way, I pray thee, and I will speak. He must not hear. Listen, O Protector of the Poor! Thou wert weary in heart these years ago when thou didst send thy son out into the desert by night. And Miriam, thy slave—she did love the child, and her heart was sore as his little feet were led by her (at thy bidding) out over the sands—far out into the blackness of the night. So I hid the little one, and afterwards sent him by secret to the home of the good hakeem, who has saved many of the Bedouin little ones. The hakeem did promise that he would care for Ameen as though he were one of his own. And so—he is no longer a Bedouin,

O my lord. He could not live in the desert tents, now that he has learned to love the Inglisi. Forgive me, I have wronged my lord——”

The sheikh did not listen to more. Very gently he pressed the woman from his side. Then he strode across the tent, and faced the boy so as to look closely into his eyes.

“ In the name of Allah the Compassionate, art thou happy in thy life with the Hakeem Hannan ? ” he asked with shaking voice. “ Speak quickly, I pray thee, and speak only the truth. More than thou knowest waits upon thy words.”

The boy smiled at the question, which, to his mind, seemed needless.

“ I know not why thou dost ask, O Sheikh of the Bedouins. But, if thou wouldest know—I would give my life for the sake of my father.” Then the speaker’s face clouded as he added : “ That was why I rode so far this day.”

The sheikh’s bearded face became almost expressionless.

“ It is well,” he muttered softly. “ The prophet (whose name be blessed !) bade every man bow willingly to the commands of Allah the Merciful. Shall Sheikh Yusef Hosein disobey his Lord’s commands ? ”

The old man turned aside with a sigh. Then he suddenly stirred himself to activity, and clapped his hands to summon a servant, who quickly appeared.

“ Have horses prepared at once for myself, Shukri Ibrahim and the Inglisi ! ” he commanded in brisk tones. “ We start on a journey at once ! ”

Across the desert three riders sped as swiftly as three Arab steed of pure blood could carry them.

A headlong race—a brief pause for rest—another gallop—then an interval for food.

The town of Mosul was their first destination, with Ain Ali their final goal.

In passing a little village they were unexpectedly confronted by two of the Sultan's soldiers, who issued from a plantation and turned their horses so as to face the oncomers. Shukri Ibrahim gave an exclamation of anger as he saw the would-be obstructors of the free way.

But the sheikh did not utter a word. He set his teeth grimly, pressed his knees tightly to the sides of his steed, and darted forward like a pebble flung from a sling.

Shukri and Ameen were close behind. The former drove the butt of his gun straight at the chest of one of the soldiers, as the sheikh (having no weapon with him but a knife) bent forward and caught the other by the throat. So swiftly did he ride, that the impact carried the enemy backwards from his horse, and to the onlookers it appeared as if the old man was carrying the soldier by the throat at arm's length.

"Dog!" he cried furiously. "Would you dare to put your vile carcase in the way of the Sheikh of the Bedouins?"

Then he opened his fingers, and the unfortunate man fell a dead weight upon the ground.

The little mountain town of Ain Ali was soon reached.

A few guarded inquiries elicited the information that a party of armed mountaineers had left the village on the north road early that morning. They were all mounted. Yes, there was an Englishman and a boy with them. They had said that they were the Sultan's

special police, and that the English people were prisoners for whom a great ransom had been offered.

So it was not long before the trio were again in the saddle, and hastening in pursuit of the caravan.

At last, coming round the spur of a hill, the pursuers found themselves only a few hundred yards from a small group of riders. In a few seconds the caravan was in full flight, fighting viciously as it ran.

The old chief was foremost in the chase. His eyes saw nothing but a little English boy clinging frightened to his father's side. To him the sheikh guided his horse. At a few yards distant he bent low, and just as he came alongside the child, the old man's arm darted forward like the swoop of a hawk for its prey. He caught the lad by an arm, swung him to the front of the saddle, and then galloped forward laughing as he held the child close to his breast.

"Fear not, little one," he said. "With old Yusef no child shall ever find harm."

Nor had Shukri Ibrahim been any less agile than his master. But the act of rescue could not be so quickly accomplished with a man as it was with a child. Yet he did not delay a second longer than was necessary.

Reaching the Englishman, the Arab reined his horse suddenly to its haunches.

"Quick, O Hakeem," he said. "In the name of Allah, get swiftly behind me ere these dogs know that their prey has escaped!"

The doctor needed no second bidding, and, in a second or two more, he, too, was following in the sheikh's tracks, with his boy Ameen galloping close beside him. And before the dismayed caravan

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could rally their senses, the three riders had vanished among the ravines, bearing with them the two rescued captives.

"What can I give thee, O Sheikh of the Bedouins—my brother—to repay thee for what thou hast done for me and mine this day?" the doctor asked earnestly.

Solemnly the old Arab took the delicate hand in his own hairy clasp.

"The Bedouin seeks no reward for services done for those who have taken food in his tent, or in the tents of his people," he said. "In the name of Allah—for the sake of—Ameen—all that I have is thine. My house is thy house, O Hakeem the Good!"

The particular stress which the sheikh put upon the boy's name was sufficient to tell the doctor that the secret was his own no longer. His face showed anxiety, as he questioned in an undertone:

"Thou knowest? Wilt thou claim him whom I love as my own, and make my life unhappy?"

The Bedouin paused for a moment. He looked first at the softened face of the doctor, and then, with a father's yearning turned to the son who knew not his rightful parent. Then he glanced again at the Englishman, and spoke in solemn tones, loud enough for all to hear.

"My house is thy house. All that I have is thine. Understandest thou me, O Hakeem? I said 'All!' Thou wilt rest in the tents of my people until danger is past. Then thou—and thy sons—shall journey wherever it may seem best to thee. May the peace of Allah be with you!"

"And to you—peace!" replied the doctor in the Arab way.

# THE ISLE OF TERROR

## CHAPTER I

### THE HURRICANE

IT was a mad proceeding from the start. Any person who ventures far from the shore in Fijian waters in a small motor boat at the approach of the hurricane season is reckless beyond reason. At any odd moment he is likely to find himself exploring the realms of fishes.

A Fijian, or other expert sailor, in a suitable craft might take the risk, but the occasion would need to be very pressing. In any event, a tiny motor boat would be about as safe as a stick of dynamite.

But what could you have expected? When two boys had adapted an old cycle motor to drive a propeller, would it have been humanly possible for them to have sat patiently at home to wait three months before testing the result of their combined genius?

Blame the summer holidays if you like. If it had not been holiday time at Suva Grammar School very likely the experiment would not have been made, for Gordon Moreland and his cousin, Lindsay Macrae, would have been better employed with their books—perhaps. While you are at it, you may as well blame Moreland's father, who had recently buckled up his motor cycle in a vain attempt to ride up a coco-nut tree on a dark night, and had since then discarded cycling in favour of a more reliable means of locomotion.

Yes, blame anything or anybody you like, other than two boys who were standing on the beach at Nandronga, viewing the completed results of their handiwork.

"She looks a bonzer!" was Gordon's enthusiastic comment as he gazed upon the smart-looking little vessel which was riding upright on blocks after the recent trial.

"That motor goes like a bird," was the no less delighted opinion of the younger lad. "Let's start her again! It is a positive treat to hear the way she sings."

For the twentieth time the ingenious little hand-start was turned, whereupon the machinery immediately obeyed the impulse, and the propeller whirred with the exhilarating sound of many wings. Truly it was an exciting moment. Lindsay was fairly dancing with enjoyment, though the more sedate Gordon (equally excited at heart, no doubt) was more controlled, and stood with his head on one side critically watching the action of the engine in the approved engineer's manner.

"There's certainly nothing the matter with that little motor," was Moreland's solemn verdict, to which his cousin returned briskly :

"Wrong? We simply must try her in the water, Gordon. I'm dead certain that she'll skim over the sea like a flying fish!"

"She'll go, right enough," was the elder boy's reply. "I have no doubt on that score. We may need a bit of ballast for'ard to equal the weight in the stern. But there's not a bit of doubt but that the Water Sprite will do a bit of moving once she is afloat."

"Then why not launch her now? We needn't go far. Besides, the lagoon is as smooth as a pond—hardly a ripple. We need only go as far as the reef opening and back again. Half an hour will do the job. Come on, Gordon! Be a sport!"

It was difficult to resist such persuading. After all, the sky was quite clear. There had not been even a drop of rain in the district for some weeks, and the lagoon was, as Lindsay had said, as level as though it had been smoothed with a steam-roller.

"Have we enough petrol?" asked Gordon hesitatingly, but with sufficient interest to encourage Macrae to believe that his persuasions had almost, if not entirely, won. "It wouldn't take much for—just a little—run—"

"Any amount!" Lindsay interjected. "There's quite half a tin, in addition to what we have already in the tank. So, come on, Gordon! Fill her up, and give the Water Sprite her maiden voyage."

Moreland was conquered. The enthusiasm of his cousin was more than he could withstand, and in another moment he was bustling about the preparations for the great event. These preliminaries did not take long. A little extra lubricating, the carrying of a few blocks of coral for ballast, a log or two for rollers, the tools (including a cane-knife, without which no person in Fiji ever attempts any job) dumped in the bottom of the boat, and then the two boys were easing the little craft on its way to the water.

It was only a few minutes before the margin of the lagoon was reached, and a final steady heave had set the Water Sprite on a level keel upon the blue waters, followed waist-deep by the boys, who seldom

wore any unnecessary clothing in holiday time, and who scorned other footgear than sand-shoes.

"That's all right," said Gordon, as he quickly swung himself over the gunwale and took up a position beside the wonderful engine. "If you'll take a turn at the steering for a bit, Lindsay, I'll see to the motor."

Macrae's answer was a hearty "Right-oh!" as he followed his cousin, and took hold of the tiller. "I'm ready, if you are, Gordon. Let her go!"

It was a glorious moment. From the start the little Water Sprite was as obedient to rudder and engine as though she had been at it for years. At a fine pace she skimmed along, much to the delight of a Fijian fisher-boy near by, who playfully pretended to chase the craft and spear it, as though he were pursuing a finned prey.

"No good!" laughed Lindsay, as he waved his hand in passing. "We're off—for the Yasawas. Back again—some time! We'll send you a letter in a few days to say how we are getting on!"

There is many a true word spoken in fun, and Lindsay had reason to remember his promise before many hours had passed.

The first intention was, as we know, only to make a circuit of the lagoon. But, as the reef was approached, the temptation to see how the little craft would take the surf was too much to be resisted. So they headed straight through the narrow opening in full enjoyment of the novel experience. On they went for a couple of miles or more, and the Water Sprite danced with delight as the spray crackled over her bows like showers of diamonds.

Then—with all the suddenness of such events in Fijian waters—a squall swept round the headlands. It was not very severe, and Tom headed the boat to meet it. But, at the same time, the boys were not so ignorant as to neglect the warning, and they immediately decided that they must return to land without delay. But the first squall was rapidly succeeded by another, and a fiercer one, which canted the boat until she shipped water over the port gunwale.

"That won't do, Lindsay," called the older boy from his position amidships, realizing at once the seriousness of the outlook.

"Keep her heading out to sea for a bit until we see what's going to happen. If she cants like that again, we'll be done for."

But instead of falling, the wind rapidly increased its strength, while the sky darkened and slight rain began to fall—signs which indicated that a hurricane was well on its way. Once or twice the boys attempted to head for the shore again, but each venture proved as risky as the first, and only resulted in shipping a quantity of water, which Gordon had immediately to bail out with his felt hat.

"Our only hope is that we may be able to make for Malolo, or one of the other islands towards the Yasawas," Moreland said. By that time he was obliged to call loudly in order to make his voice heard above the driving wind and the roaring rain.

"If we try to turn, we're done for. Stick to it, Lindsay! We'll be all right if we go the way the hurricane wants."

The boy knew that the position was critical, but he tried to look on the best side.

"That's all right, Gordon," answered Macrae, cheerily. "The fishes will have to go without their tea to-day. When you're tired come and take the tiller, and I'll take a spell at the bailing!"

By this time the hurricane had found its full power. It played with the little boat as though toying with a cork. And the rain came in driving sheets, until, at last, both boys were obliged for a time to leave the craft to the mercy of sea and wind while they united their efforts to keep the boat from being swamped by the water from sky and wave.

Then darkness came—the darkness of night made doubly dark by the blackness of the storm. Turn about, the boys worked—one at the tiller, while the other bailed as well as he could with a cap. Still, by unceasing labour, they succeeded in keeping the boat from being utterly swamped. But, as the night advanced and the hurricane showed no signs of abating, both lads were forced to realize that their strength was rapidly reaching the limit of endurance.

The spells at bailing became briefer as each took his turn, until ultimately Gordon was horrified to see his cousin lurch forward from his seat by the tiller and fall heavily to the bottom of the boat.

"What's the matter?" the elder cried, as he quickly moved to raise his cousin. "Come on, old chap! Try to buck up! This can't last for ever. We must reach Malolo soon!"

But Lindsay had fallen into the deep unconsciousness of utter exhaustion. He could neither hear the voice, nor could he feel the efforts that Moreland made to rub some life into his numb limbs. And it was too

dangerous to neglect the tiller. The engine had long ceased to require any attention, being half buried in water. So all that Gordon could do was to place his companion in as comfortable a position as possible, while he set himself grimly to the task of keeping the boat ahead of the wind, as with one free hand he attempted to prevent it being utterly swamped by the incoming waters.

In his heart he believed that it was a lost endeavour. It could only be a matter of time until the dreaded moment came and the black sea would claim its double prey. But life is ever dear. And so Gordon fought on—mechanically gripping the tiller; and as mechanically bailing with a regular swing of his body, while he stared steadily into the blackness ahead with the dim hope of seeing land.

At last the plucky lad began to lose all sense of time, as his exhausted nerves and muscles lessened in obedience. He dimly seemed to feel as though he had been gripping the tiller with his benumbed fingers for many hours, while the relentless rain thrashed his back with incredible vehemence. Once he thought that he could discern white breakers, as on a coral reef, and with a flash of understanding, he flung his weight to one side in order to steer from destruction.

Then came the moment when his faculties began to desert him. Once or twice he swayed, and only recovered his position by an instinctive effort. Then the long-averted stupor crept over him. He had no more strength with which to resist. He felt himself falling. He was dreamily conscious that his hand had left the tiller; but he cared no more. Then

all his muscles became suddenly limp. He moaned, swayed a little to one side. Next moment he had fallen unconscious to the bottom of the boat beside his cousin.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ISLE OF PALMS

MORELAND awoke to feel the hot sun pouring fiercely upon him. As if waking from a dream, he slowly opened his eyes, and saw what appeared to be a wall made of boards before him. He could not account for this, so he looked down and discovered that his body was half immersed in water. That was puzzling. Sea water for blankets, and bungalow walls right up against his face ! Where was he ?

With rapidly returning senses Gordon at last began to recall the horrors of the previous night, and it was not long before he was sufficiently restored to remember that Macrae had been a sharer in the terrible adventure. He turned to look for his cousin. Macrae was at his side, and, to the elder boy's delight, was moving slightly, with signs that he, too, was recovering from his exhaustion.

"Lindsay ! Lindsay ! Wake up, old man. We're safe—quite safe !" Moreland said, giving his companion a slight shake by the arm.

Macrae opened his eyes drowsily.

"What's the matter ?" he asked, slowly. "It isn't time to get up yet, and—and—I'm—terribly sleepy."

Gordon could not help laughing at the comical expression on his cousin's face as he blinked at the streaming sun and drove his knuckles into his sleepy eyes.

"Time to get up?" he repeated cheerfully. "It's time for that hours ago. Come on! Rouse yourself, for it is long past breakfast time."

After more coaxing and shaking, Lindsay was at last fully awake, and his first sensible remark was characteristic of the boy's naturally happy-go-lucky disposition.

"It's a nice morning, Gordon. I said that we were bound for the Yasawas, you remember. When did we drop anchor there?"

Again Gordon laughed, as he realized the possible fulfilment of the careless prophecy.

"I don't know whether we are at the Yasawas or not," he said, "but I have just had a look over the side of the boat, and she's riding close to shore as quiet as if she were at Nondronga. The hurricane must have driven us into shelter, after all."

"Any houses about?" questioned Macrae, slowly raising himself on stiff and aching limbs to look over the gunwale with his companion castaway.

"Not a sign," the other boy answered. "Plenty of beach, and any amount of palms. But it doesn't appear to me as if the place was very thickly populated with either Fijians or whites. However, we'd better get to land and explore. Besides, I don't know how you feel; but something to eat wouldn't go amiss with me at present."

"Nor me," added Lindsay ungrammatically but devoutly.

It was one thing to propose; another thing to perform. Both the young adventurers were stiff and sore after their long immersion and exposure, and on another occasion it would have been comical

to have seen the clumsy way in which they struggled over the side of the boat into the shallow water of the lagoon, splashing overboard like a couple of turtles rather than normal boys.

Presently they began to wade towards shore, towing the unlucky Water Sprite by the painter. Still, even when dry land was reached, they were pleased enough to sit down upon the warm white sand for a time to rest after even that little exertion.

Presently they began to look around. In the far distance, beyond the protecting reef, they could see distant land, which suggested that they were still within sight of the main island, which they had forsaken so unwillingly on the previous night.

"Judging by the look of things, I imagine that we'll have to postpone the little Yasawas trip for another occasion," remarked Moreland chaffingly. "It seems to me as if we had come in a fairly straight line from Nondronga. The shape of these distant hills looks like the range behind Lautoka."

Lindsay quietly nodded in agreement, and added: "In that case, we are on one of the smaller islands, somewhere about Malolo. Perhaps there is a Fijian town not far off. Shall we have a look?"

"After a bit," said Gordon. "Meantime, tucker is the thing we need to discover. One of these palms ought to supply the needful. Let's go inland, and see what we can find. I'll get the cane-knife from the boat."

It was true that there were palms in plenty, but fruit was remarkably scarce. The ground was littered with husks, but it seemed as though marauders had done their best to strip every one, and had de-

voured the contents of the nuts on the spot. At last, however, a tree was found with a fair supply of fruit, and it did not take Moreland long to climb up it in Fijian fashion, with the cane-knife stuck in his belt behind so as to be handy for cutting the nuts from the stem.

After a fairly satisfactory meal the boys felt sufficiently strengthened to set out exploring. To their disappointment the island was small and they walked round the shore in much less than an hour. Of residents, they found none. An old, dilapidated hut showed that there had been someone there at some time or other ; but a few broken earthenware pots and some whitened bones that were undoubtedly human suggested that the hermit, whoever he might have been, had not found the island very hospitable.

" What's to be done ? " questioned Lindsay, when he and his cousin had returned from their round of the island, and were sitting on the sand beside the boat, which they had beached for possible repairs.

" There's only one thing that I can think of," began Gordon thoughtfully. " Having no petrol, the motor is out of the question. It's hardly likely that anyone would think of looking for us here, even though we tried to make fire signals. Anyone seeing them would only think that we were Fiji turtle-hunters. But we might be able to weave a sort of sail out of the long grass—in time."

" What about the remains of the hut ? There is enough matting left there on the walls to make a small sail—enough if we had a decent breeze."

This suggestion was received with delight.

" Bravo, Lindsay ! You're a bonzer Robinson

Crusoe! It's worth while being wrecked on a desert island with a chap like you!" exclaimed Gordon with delight, at the same time rising briskly with full intention to put the proposition into immediate effect. "A mast is easily shaped with the cane-knife and there are plenty of vines in the bush for ropes. Let's get to work. If we don't, some silly idiot will be coming out and rescuing us! Think of that! I'd never be able to look a pal in the face again."

"I'd give something to be able to look a beefsteak in the face just now," returned Lindsay, with a comical pretence of misery, as he slowly rose and prepared to help his cousin with the new rigging of the poor Water Sprite.

## CHAPTER III

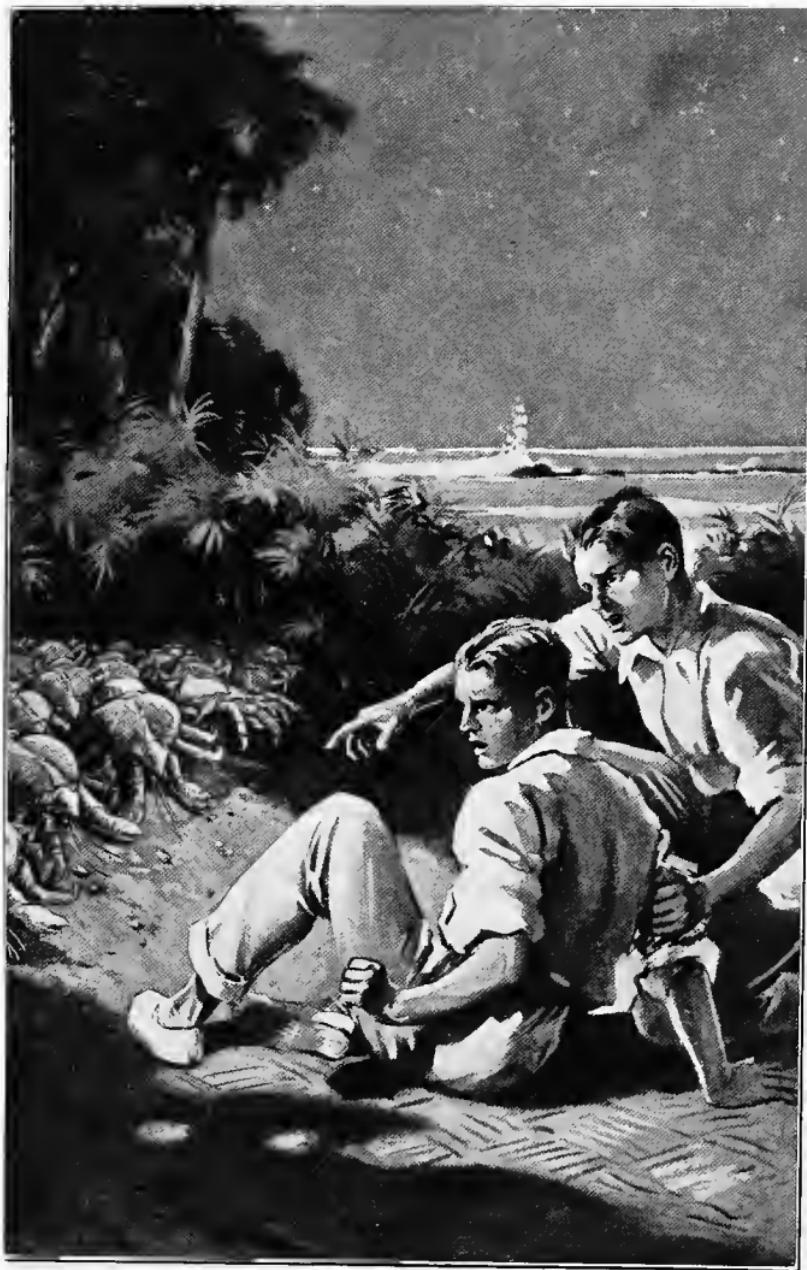
### A TERRIBLE ENEMY

THE day was drawing to a close by the time the rough preparations for the second adventurous journey were completed to satisfaction.

Certainly the Water Sprite did not look quite so ladylike with a rough pole for a mast, grass matting for a sail, and twisted vines for cordage. Still, the rig promised to be fairly serviceable, providing the weather was moderate, but it was decided to postpone the journey until the following morning, and a good stock of nuts was stored in the boat to serve as food in case, through any cause, the trip took longer than was anticipated. Then, quite contented with their labours—their only trouble being anxiety for the uneasy minds of those at home—the boys prepared to enjoy a good night's rest on shore.

The prospect of sleeping out of doors in these tropical regions was nothing unusual to either Moreland or Macrae, and the full moon was just climbing up into the sky when the lads stretched themselves on a luxurious mattress of fresh palm leaves covered with the remains of the matting. Too tired to talk, the lads were soon asleep.

They must have slept soundly for a couple of hours or so, when Gordon suddenly awoke with the thought that someone had pulled the sleeve of his shirt. He sat up briskly, and looked around him in the moonlight, which lit up the bush and the lagoon as if with electric arc lamps. He could see nothing unusual,



"LOOK!"



though, for the moment, he fancied he could hear a sound like the springing of the jaws of a steel trap. His cane knife was at hand, and he instinctively gripped the handle.

Then he believed that he could hear a strange movement in the undergrowth around—something like the sound of a regiment of tiny feet running over the sand and gravel, mingled sometimes with hissing like that of serpents. And, as he listened, there crept over him the eerie feeling that he was being watched by many curious eyes from the thick undergrowth.

Unable to stand the strain any longer, he roused his cousin hurriedly.

"Lindsay! Lindsay!" he exclaimed in a hoarse undertone. "Wake up! There's something in the bush—all around us. I don't know what it is, but it gives me the creeps. It sounds as if there were a thousand devils watching us."

Macrae was alert in an instant, and he sat up briskly.

"What is it, Gordon? Can you see anything?"

"See? No. But I can hear a lot. Listen!"

For a few seconds the boys held their breath as they listened to the sounds which Gordon had vaguely described.

"Yes," said Lindsay presently. "I can hear something like—I don't know what it's like, but—See! The grass is moving there to the right! And over there, too. And there!"

"Look!"

Moreland had suddenly gripped his cousin by the arm with one hand while, with the other, he was point-

ing to the edge of the grass where it bordered the white sand, beyond which stretched the moonlit waters of the lagoon. "Look!" he repeated. "Land crabs—hundreds of them—monsters, coming straight for us! Up, Lindsay! Get a club, anything—one of the stumps from the old hut. Hurry, or we'll be eaten alive!"

They were the huge land crabs that are sometimes found in these islands. Their chief diet is the coconut, and their claws are capable of breaking the wrist of an average man.

The boys were on their feet by this time. Gordon held the cane-knife, while Lindsay wrenched from its socket one of the old supports of the hut. And they were not in readiness too soon, for, as they turned, they saw on all sides the shining backs and gaping claws of an immense army of land crabs—an attacking force from which retreat was an impossibility.

It was easy to understand their purpose. Evidently the island was a warren where these voracious creatures had bred undisturbed for ages, unless the ruined hut and whitened bones told a tale of one invader who had paid the penalty. Starving through the scanty supply of nuts that form portion of their diet, these creatures, carnivorous as cannibals, had scented flesh, and now they had come in their hordes, determined to feast on a ghastly banquet.

Lindsay's club swung. There was a crash of shell armour. One of the advance guard had made a forward rush, but he was hurtled back among his fellows by the swinging blow. Then it seemed that devils were indeed let loose at this first shock of battle. Instantly a host of crabs set upon their wounded

comrade—snapping their claws, fighting with one another for food—a writhing mass of legs and claws.

But the boys had no time to give to that scene. The circle was rapidly closing upon them.

"Keep your eyes well skinned, Lindsay," was Gordon's warning. "If one of these creatures gets you by the leg he'll crush the bone, or tear out the flesh. Look out."

And the long knife made a swift cut at one of the monsters that had tried to fulfil the very prophecy as it was uttered.

"They're coming on again!" cried Lindsay, indicating those from the beach. "Get back to back. Then we won't be taken by surprise from any side."

Then followed a grim battle—possibly one of the most desperate that two boys had ever been called upon to fight. From all directions the creatures came, while club and knife took a continuous toll. It was impossible not to realize the strait in which the lads stood. The swift crush of a lion's jaws would be a pleasant death compared with tearing by a thousand pincer claws. And once the first grip was taken, they would only rest when every speck of flesh was torn from the bones.

With panting breath the boys fought. Sweat was streaming from their bodies with the fierce exertion on that tropical night. Hundreds of crabs were killed, but the contending numbers were so great that it seemed as though neither club nor knife was able to diminish these armies by a fraction.

Truly it was a living nightmare. Once Gordon slipped on some of the crushed flesh that littered the ground. Instantly followed a rush of the terrible

creatures with gaping claws quivering for the spoil. Moreland was on his side, but Lindsay's club crashed as it had never crashed before on that dreadful night, and he battered around his cousin until the knife was once more at work.

"What's to be done?" Moreland gasped as soon as he had recovered his position. "This can't go on for ever. I can't fight much longer, and they'll never give in till morning comes."

"There's only one thing—watch our chance, and then make a leap and a rush for the boat. The line is thinnest by the shore. They prefer the cover of the bush."

"We'll have to risk it," agreed Moreland, without relaxing the fight while he spoke. "I can't keep it up much longer. Move a little to the right, and draw the crabs in that direction. They'll set upon the wounded ones there. And when I give the word, jump for it, Lindsay. We may get a nip or two by the way. Even if one gets a good hold, bring him along. Now! Now! Spring for it—jump!"

One after the other the boys leapt where the line was thinnest, hoping to be able to reach the boat before the crabs turned to follow. And, in the main, they were successful. One of the creatures succeeded in snapping at Gordon as he landed on the far side of the line, but it was only a skin wound, and the flash of the knife prevented a grip from the second claw. There were yet a few to be met on the way, but these, being scattered were more readily dealt with.

A short rush to the boat, a combined push in frantic energy, a leap—then a cry of triumph! The boys were afloat, and, as they looked back, the white beach

was already swarming with countless numbers of infuriated creatures looking in vain for their lost prey.

There was no attempt to hoist the sail for some time. One after another coco-nuts were tapped, and the refreshing liquid poured down parched throats. But at last came rest and strength. The vine ropes were pulled, and the strange sail set, while, with Gordon's hand on the tiller, the Water Sprite turned her prow homewards to the distant lights on the far-off mainland.

It was an exciting story that the boys had to tell when they reached Nandronga some ten hours later.

# THE SERPENT'S ISLE

## CHAPTER I

### BECALMED

"OH, yes, Slick, we are having a bonzer, top-notch time, and no mistake about it!" exclaimed Dan Somers as he rested upon his oar, and thus sarcastically addressed the back of his companion, who had also eased off for a few minutes following a prolonged spell of rowing.

The boy referred to as "Slick" (his real name was Stephen Halse) turned on his seat with a smile on his rather tired-looking face.

"Well, you are always thirsting for adventure, Dan. Now you've got it, what more do you want?" he asked chaffingly.

"Tucker!" was the prompt reply.

Halse laughed quietly. Though he sympathized fervently with the sentiment, his was not the nature that was easily depressed so long as a speck of hope remained on the horizon.

"I believe there is still a bit of boiled yam in the tucker locker," he said, but the suggestion only brought an exclamation of disgust from his friend.

"Bah! Yam—cold, stodgy stuff! And I am dying for a good beefsteak with plenty of hot potatoes!"

Halse slowly nodded his head, and remarked, as he glanced over the side of the boat:

"I don't see any sign of a good fairy coming out of the lagoon with the needful, Dan. But the sea is full of fish. We might have a feast if we had any means in the boat for cooking them."

"Or catching them——"

"Perhaps Apenisa, there, would jump overboard and catch a few for us?" was Slick's next suggestion. "True, as you say, we have no lines or hooks. But we've got salt. He might manage to put a little on their tails. What about it, Apenisa, my fuzzy-headed friend?"

The boy thus addressed was a diminutive Fijian lad who at that moment was sitting perched, like a monkey, upon the stern gunwale. He was supposed to be steering the boat. This he was accomplishing with fair success by gripping the tiller with the toes of his left foot. His main attention, however, was given to the art of rolling some very rank tobacco in a piece of dried palm leaf so as to make one of the choice cigarettes which Fijians (old and young of both sexes) apparently enjoy.

Hearing his name spoken, the boy looked up and bared his white teeth in a wide grin, but he did not seem to have any immediate answer ready.

"He's quite happy, at any rate," said Halse. "And if he can be contented under the circumstances, why should we grumble? Besides—look at the scenery! Isn't it grand?"

As he spoke, the older boy waved his arm towards the tropical island which the boat was slowly approaching.

But Dan was in no mood for appreciating the beauties of nature.

"If scenery was everything—well, perhaps I'd be as contented as Apenisa," he growled. "But it isn't good enough for me. After half a day and a whole night becalmed—the night as black as pitch, without even a star to steer by—all the tucker gone except a chunk of yam! We are lost absolutely, among these islands, every two of which look like twins—"

"And Dan Somers as grumpy as an old Tom cat sitting on a tarry fence and can't rise up—" Halse interrupted. "Dan, I'm disappointed in you! We have had heaps of adventures before, and this promises to be the very best of the bunch!"

Dan groaned. He was not quite the weak-kneed boy that his words would have one suppose, but he was that kind of chap who seems to take a considerable pleasure in making hardships appear in their worst light. Of course he was hungry, and so was his companion. They had set out from Viti Levu (the main island) during the previous morning, intending to visit some friends who lived on an island some twenty miles distant, and had taken only a small amount of provender with them, for the wind had been fair for some days, and the run promised to be only a short one.

About noon, however, the boat had run into a dead calm. Expecting the breeze to freshen, the boys had not troubled to take the oars until well on in the afternoon. Then night had fallen with unusual darkness, and the voyagers had lost their bearings among the many islands of the archipelago.

They had rowed at intervals all night and, when morning came, they found themselves in an unknown

lagoon with no food left but the small piece of yam already referred to. So one could hardly expect that life would seem particularly rosy in the circumstances, though Halse insisted on keeping a hopeful view of the case.

"There's one thing," he presently remarked—"judging by the look of the place from this distance, there ought to be plenty of coco-nuts on those palms ahead of us. We can reach the island in half an hour or so, if we pull steadily. Probably we'll find a Fijian village, and then we'll be all right. Have you any idea where we are, Apenisa? You ought to know your own country."

The boy shook his head.

"Me not know. Me seen plenty islands in this place, but forget——O-o-oh!"

The last utterance was a sudden cry of fear that startled both Slick and Dan so that they nearly dropped their oars. And they were yet more surprised when the Fijian servant tumbled from his perch, and ducked down under the seat upon which Halse was seated. There he crouched, trembling and moaning.

"Why, whatever is the matter with you?" exclaimed Dan. "What's gone wrong?"

Shaking with terror, the boy turned a startled face to his young master, and pointed, trembling, towards the island ahead.

"Look, turanga! Look! The tongue of the Black Serpent."

"The Black Serpent?" repeated Dan in amazement. "What do you mean? I see no serpent."

Both Somers and Halse were scanning the surface

of the lagoon to discover the cause of the Fijian's fright, but the latter excitedly directed their eyes to the summit of the mountain, which rose up from the centre of the island.

"Look—top of high hill—tongue of Black Serpent! This very bad place—all devils live here. Very bad place—Gatu Loa very bad!"

"Gatu Loa—Black Serpent Island!" repeated Halse with a slight dawning of understanding. "I've heard my father speak of the place. It's said to be inhabited by evil spirits."

"They'll have some tucker to give away, at any rate," rejoined the practical Dan, but Halse shook his head.

"As far as I remember, Dad said that no Fijian would live on the place for fear of some demon or other. But what was that about a serpent's tongue, Apenisa?"

For answer, the servant pointed a trembling finger towards the summit of the mountain. Hitherto, it had seemed to be covered with trees, but now, as the boat drifted a little to the eastward, a rocky summit had come into view, exposing a Y-shaped formation, which certainly bore a most remarkable resemblance to the forked tongue of a snake pointed skywards.

But neither Halse nor Somers were superstitiously inclined. Indeed, Dan was immediately scornful, and did not hesitate to show his scorn both by word and a slight kick delivered at the figure under Stephen's seat.

"Don't be an ass, Apenisa!" he said. "What harm can a bit of rock do you? Get up out of the

bottom of the boat, and take hold of the tiller again. Come on ! Hurry up, and we'll be on shore in no time. Then you will soon find out what a fool you have been."

## CHAPTER II

### HIDDEN HANDS

RELUCTANTLY, but afraid to disobey his young master, Apenisa crept back to his perch on the gunwale, but he did not dare to raise his head to look towards the ill-omened isle. Meantime the boys resumed their oars, and began to pull steadily for land.

"I wonder if we'll have any luck, after all?" questioned Dan, who seemed to have recovered most of his normal cheerfulness, after the Fijian's exhibition of funk. "Perhaps your *pater* may have made a mistake."

"That doesn't seem very likely," rejoined Halse. "As Commissioner his business is to visit all these islands and find out how the people are getting on. He'd have known if this one was inhabited—that is to say, supposing it is Black Serpent Island, as your boy says."

"In any case the name doesn't sound very inviting," the other remarked with a shrug.

"Probably it is only the name that is black," laughed Slick. "There is some old yarn about an enormous serpent god, and this island was put upon the serpent to hold him down so that he couldn't do any more mischief. But the beast always keeps on growing, and some day he will grow so big and strong that he will shake off the old island and swallow it up, and, of course, at the same time swallow up any

people who happen to be living there. At least, that is as much of the story as I remember."

"Very likely that queer rock on the top of the mountain started the whole silly yarn," commented Dan. "If I were a Fijian, it would take a lot more than a mad superstition to scare me away from an island like this. Why, it is fairly covered with bush, and would make fine plantations."

Then, unable to resist the temptation to poke fun, the boy addressed the huddled Apenisa :

"What do you think? How about building a bungalow for the three of us, and starting a nice copra business on our own?"

But the very suggestion of such an adventure sent a cold shiver through the Fijian's body.

"Me no stay this place. Him very bad place—Gatu Loa," the lad muttered.

"But if we are with you? No harm could come to you then!" said Dan, and Halse joined in the banter:

"Surely you wouldn't be afraid if we all stayed together?"

Still Apenisa was not to be persuaded as to the attractions of life on such a spot. Not daring even to raise his eyes to look at the place, he shook his head obstinately while he answered:

"No Fiji man will live on Galu Loa——Turanga! Turanga!"

It had been a sudden change from almost muttering to a yell of abject terror that the Fijian's last words expressed. Just for a moment he started upright, and gazed around him while his face was distorted with horror. Then he sprang forward at imminent

risk of upsetting the boat, and crouched down in his previous position at Dan's feet, trembling in every muscle.

"Oh, Turanga!" the lad wailed. "Go not to Gatu Loa! Big devil put hand on back to take me. Me feel him cold and wet!"

The boys again ceased rowing, and Dan questioned in amazement:

"What in all the wide world is the matter with the kid? He seems to have gone stark, staring mad!"

"Devil put hand on back—cold, wet hand!" was all that the Fijian could say.

Somers stood up, and strained forward to look over the stern of the boat, though still holding his ear ready to pull if something unexpected occurred. But, after scanning the blue lagoon, and seeing nothing to account for the boy's scare, he attributed the whole affair to superstition which, as is well known, will often cause a Fijian to imagine anything.

"Don't be funky, Apenisa," was the rough admonition. "I have half a mind to pick you up and chuck you overboard—carrying on like a girl afraid of the dark."

But even this threat of being cast into the arms of the devil did not succeed in calming the fears of the Fijian. He continued to tremble, and all that he would say was to repeat:

"Devil put hand on back to take me!"

This was more than Dan could bear with patience.

"If you don't stop that rubbish there will be another hand on your back in a second—and it won't be either a wet or a cold one!" was the threat. "Get

up out of it, you idiot, or we'll have to start bailing to keep the boat from being swamped!"

"Great Scott!"

This time it was Halse whose exclamation of astounded amazement opened up a new chapter in the morning's adventures. Dan turned quickly, and gazed wonderingly at his friend, who had risen from his seat and was standing with arms stretched wide in an attitude of complete bewilderment.

Dan found it quite impossible to restrain a peal of laughter at his pal's dazed manner.

"What's the matter with you now?" he exclaimed. "Have you also got this devil madness—the cold, wet hand on your back?"

"My oar—something took hold of it—and tugged it out of my hand!" was the amazing reply.

"Nonsense," retorted Dan. "You must have struck it on a part of the coral reef, or got it entangled in seaweed, or—something of that sort."

"Don't you believe it," Halse returned, his momentary surprise giving place to calmer reason "Do you think I don't know when I 'catch a crab'?"

"It couldn't be anything else," commented his unbelieving friend. "Oars are not pulled out of our hands in any other way in the middle of a lagoon."

"But mine was!" interrupted Slick. "And it wasn't a backward wrench either, as if I had let it be caught in weeds or in a cleft of the coral. I tell you, something took hold of the oar and pulled it straight out of my hand. That's the truth."

"Impossible!"

"But I saw it, Dan! Believe me, or don't believe me, I saw the whole affair. What's more, it went

straight down into the water—end down, just as if a hand had pulled it! A dropped oar would float. But look for yourself, old man! Can you see it floating anywhere?"

Dan followed the suggestion, and he was forced to admit that Halse's statement had evidence in its favour.

"Not a sign," was his verdict. "What's to be done? We seem to have tumbled across a mighty mystery, and everything is plotting against us—no wind, sails of no use, one of our two oars gone! What's next?"

"Paddle with one oar at the stern, and get to land as quickly as possible," decided Halse, and he briskly proceeded to unship the rudder preparatory to carrying out his proposal with Dan's oar.

Having no other alternative, the adventurers put their united strength into the single paddle with an energy that meant business, and soon the boat was making rapid headway towards the shore.

## CHAPTER III

### WEIRD REVELS

THE point to which the boys directed the boat was that of a headland where a large mass of rock had broken away from the side of the cliff and had formed a rampart of large boulders across the sand from the mainland right into the sea. These tumbled rocks provided a cove where the craft might be conveniently beached, but where it would be hidden securely in the event of the island being inhabited.

As soon as the nose of the boat grounded the boys jumped ashore. They were closely followed by Apenisa, who was too frightened to be left alone, though he moved in the stunned manner of one who hardly knew what he was doing. The painter being made fast to a convenient boulder, the three boys then proceeded to scramble over the rocks towards the bush on the higher ground. Their intention was first to forage for coco-nuts, and afterwards to explore the island on the off-chance of finding a village.

While scrambling onwards, the explorers came across a pool of water that greatly interested them. It was shaped as though a large bowl had been hewn out of the solid rock to a surface diameter of some twenty feet, and the edge that sloped into the water was as smooth as if it had been ground by hand. It was a pleasing discovery.

As the water within the bowl was crystal clear, it was evident that it was supplied through some hidden

connexion with the outer lagoon. Probably the wonderful smoothness was due to the rise and the fall of the tide through many ages.

"If I hadn't had just as much of the sea as I want for the present, I'd be tempted to take a plunge. It looks a bonzer place for a bath," said Dan, as he stood with his companions and looked admiringly into the limpid depths of the pool.

Halse grunted discouragingly.

"If that temptation ever gets too much for you, take my advice and don't try it while you are alone," he said. "That green slime at the edge is as smooth and slippery as wet glass. Once you went in, you'd never come out again without help. You'd never get a foothold. And it's deep——"

"I can just see the bottom and no more," interrupted Dan. "And over there—at the back where the cliff rises up from it—it seems to go right underneath the island. It is all blackness. Ugh! It gives me the creeps, now that I have seen that, Slick! It looks like a baited trap."

The speaker turned away with an expression of disgust.

"Come along, Slick!" he called. "In any case, if I were to bathe now, I wouldn't have strength to paddle. If I don't get a dozen or so of these nuts inside me soon, I'll die a horrible death."

"A dozen would make that horrible death a certainty," laughed Halse, as he followed his friend on the further scramble towards the bush. "You've got the cane-knife all right, Apenisa?"

The Fijian held up that useful implement, without which no traveller, white or brown, in these latitudes

ever journeys far. The uses of a cane-knife, from chopping wood to cleaving skulls, are manifold.

The upper land being reached, effort was soon rewarded. Generous palms were found in abundance, and Apenisa required no persuading to send him walking up a stout trunk towards the golden clusters of fruit. In a few minutes the hungry trio had enough food beside them to feed them comfortably for a week.

Dan's appetite, as well as that of his companions, was satisfied at last, and the travellers were well contented then to spend the rest of the hot day under the ample shade of the arborage, postponing, until a later hour, the proposed tour of the island. All were fatigued after the wakeful night on the sea, and a longing for sleep was making itself very manifest when Halse suddenly roused his pal from drowsiness by exclaiming, as he pointed to the lagoon :

"Look, Dan ! Are wonders never to cease to-day ?"

Dan lazily raised himself on his elbow, and turned his eyes in the direction indicated. But he was speedily stirred to more than sleepy interest.

"The water seems to have gone mad," he remarked. "Or else a thousand fishes are holding a jazz party. What do you make of it, Slick ? Think a volcano has started its fireworks for our amusement, or is it Apenisa's serpent wagging its tail ?"

Halse laughed as he turned to the gaping Apenisa, saying :

"There is the devil that tickled your back, Apenisa—or a couple of them—the same that snatched my oar—devil-fish, to be exact—a couple of them having a scrap !"

"Octopuses !" ejaculated Dan, regardless of the

rules of grammar. "By Jove, then, Apenisa, my son, you had a narrow squeak! Are you not thankful that you escaped from being *ki-ki* (food) for an octopus?"

But the Fijian did not answer. At first glimpse of the scene, he had bolted straight for the darkest part of the jungle. The sight of the writhing "devils" had been too much for him.

Both boys laughed heartily at the incident. They called on the Fijian to return, but receiving no answer they concluded that the lad was well able to take care of himself in any jungle, and made themselves comfortable to rest meantime. The desire for sleep was overpowering, and the call was yielded to without any resistance.

So the two boys slept that long and heavy sleep that exhausted nerves and muscles demand. For many hours they lay without moving, but to them it seemed to be only five minutes before they were roused by a shriek of terror near at hand, and a voice calling :

"Turanga! Turanga! Help!"

Slick and Dan were instantly wide awake, and they jumped to their feet as the cry was repeated :

"Turanga! Help!"

"It's your boy—Apenisa!" exclaimed Halse excitedly.

"What is scaring him this time?" questioned Dan, as he rushed towards the Fijian lad.

But any doubts as to the seriousness of the matter were quickly dispelled by the sight of many figures rounding a point on the shore beneath. Many of them were carrying torches, which showed that most

were also carrying clubs. All were dancing and shrieking like a lot of dark demons, while above the din came Apenisa's voice wailing: "Turanga! Turanga!"

Then a man's rough voice was heard saying in Fijian:

"Shall I strike him on the head with my club, and stop his crying, O Ndengei?"

"Not while the Black Serpent hungers," replied another voice, deep and vibrating, like the voice of the ocean itself.

"Ndengei? The Black Serpent?" repeated Halse to his friend in tones of awe. "Ndengei is the name of an old Fijian god, and the Black Serpent—What can it all mean, Dan?"

"It means that Apenisa was right—that there are devils on this island, though they are human—and that the boy has fallen into their clutches!" exclaimed Dan in feverish excitement. "Come on, Slick! I am not going to stand by and see my Fijian mauled by any devils—men or otherwise!"

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FALL OF A GOD

DAN immediately put his words into action by making a mad rush down the hill towards the beach, where the uncanny scene was being enacted. Of course, Halse was close to his friend's heels, and the wild crowd were considerably startled when two lusty lads suddenly sprang into their midst—apparently from nowhere—using their fists with vicious effect. They ploughed their way among the half-naked bodies, and tore the terrified Apenisa from the hands of two men, who were too amazed by the sudden onslaught to offer immediate resistance.

"What are you doing to this boy? How dare you lay your vile hands on my servant? Have you all gone mad?" cried Dan, breathlessly, for the fight had been sharp and furious.

The answer was a deep-throated exclamation of surprise and satisfaction from the man who had spoken of the Black Serpent's hunger.

"*Oi!* (ah !) Roko Vua" (the fisherman's god), "has sent his people *loloma*" (love gift) "without need of spear or net. *Oi!* All that is cast up by the sea is lawful food!"

The speaker then pushed his way forward until he stood facing the two boys and their rescued servant. He was a man gigantic in frame and stature. His long, straight hair was dyed red, and he was naked except for a grass skirt and the crimson flowers that decked his hair and twined in wreaths about his chest

and arms. Rings of black had been painted round his eyes to add to their ferocity, and he carried an old-time club in his hands.

At the first glimpse of the man in the torchlight, Halse gave a gasp of horror, and exclaimed in English :

“ Nalila—the runaway murderer ! ”

The Fijian smiled grimly, and replied, also in English :

“ Yes ; Nalila, the murderer—now Ndengei, the Fijian god, come back to live among his people—chief of the island of Gatu Loa ? A good joke, isn’t it ? But you shall not teach them different. We are all slaves of the Black Serpent here, and I, whom your father would have hanged for murdering a drunken planter—I am going to take back Fiji from the English and Indians, and give it to the rightful owners ! ”

“ My father will have a rope put round your neck, when he gets you ! ” retorted Halse stoutly.

The Fijian laughed, as he rejoined sarcastically :

“ When he gets me ! ”

Then he said in Fijian, with strong emphasis whose meaning could not be misunderstood by all who heard :

“ Roko Vua is good. What he sends is lawful. Gatu Loa must first be satisfied with the Fiji boy. Then my people must learn again the ways of their fathers, and enjoy the *loloma* that Roko Vua has sent. The ovens must be made ready—now ! ”

Both Halse and Somers knew enough of Fijian history to understand the full meaning of the last sentence. The superstitious awe with which the onlookers hung upon the words of this self-elected “ god ” convinced the white boys that the orders

would be carried out to the very letter. Indeed, several of the young men had immediately hailed the threat with delight, and began to scoop a hole in the sand, while others ran into the bush for wood to heat the stones which the women were throwing into the oven.

Suddenly Nalila gave a sharp order to his people, whereupon the strongest men instantly fell upon the two boys and their servant.

The struggle that followed was fierce but brief. Dan and Slick fought as only desperate British boys know how to fight. But the odds were too great. The average Fijian is a veritable giant, and he has the muscles of an ox, so it was little wonder that the boys were speedily overpowered, and were soon being dragged along the shore by their triumphant captors, headed by Nalila.

Half-carried, half-walking, the boys were forced onward to that part of the beach where the barrier of boulders lay. In no gentle manner they were then dragged over the rocks until they stood on the margin of the very bowl which the trio had examined earlier in the day.

Round the margin (so far as the cliff at the farther side would permit), gathered the torch-bearers and others, and the three captives were urged close to the slippery edge.

Then Nalila raised his voice.

"O *Gatu Loa!*" he called. "We bring thee an offering, so that thou shalt continue to leave thy slaves in peace!"

Uttering this short address, the Fijian then tore away the flowers with which he was girded, and

threw them upon the quiet pool. A moment of breathless silence followed, as all eyes were directed to the smooth surface of the water.

Halse took the opportunity to whisper to his chum : " We've got to take a big chance to-night, old man. When I call out, you grab a club from the nearest man, and then—let it swing for all you're worth. We'll sink or swim together ! "

" Right-o, Slick. I'm with you every time——"

" *O-o-oi !* "

The long-drawn exclamation of awed wonder suddenly broke from many throats, accompanied by the peculiar clicking sound which the Fijian makes when he is surprised.

The hitherto placid surface of the pool was seen to begin bubbling and churning, and presently out from the depths there appeared a pair of large staring eyes upon which the torchlight reflected with gruesome effect. Then up rose a number of writhing arms—great sinuous serpents that swept round about in a search for some object to seize.

The circle of onlookers shrank back in fear. The fleshy arms came too dangerously near, and there would be no hope for him whom they succeeded in reaching.

" *Oi ! Oi !* The servant of Gatu Loa has come to bring food for his master ! " exclaimed one of the Fijians.

" An octopus—a monster octopus ! " gasped Dick.

Then did the sham god let loose a wild cry :

" He hungers ! Let the Gatu Loa be fed with the food which the strangers have brought ! "

A shriek of terror echoed these words. It came

from the throat of poor Apenisa, who had been tightly gripped, and was now being pressed forward almost within reach of the eager writhing arms of the marine monster.

Nearer and nearer the frantic boy was urged, adding horror to the night with his shrill screams of mental agony.

Suddenly Halse in his turn let loose a cry, at the same time grabbing a club from the careless fingers of one of the men who had been too intent upon the proceedings to guard his weapon.

Acting upon the signal, Dan followed his pal's lead. A couple of swift blows instantly released the unfortunate Apenisa, and sent his persecutors tumbling backwards over the boulders. Then the pair of clubs began to swing like the branches of a tree in a hurricane.

So astounded were the Fijians by the unforeseen attack that they shrank back in terror. Most of them simply turned and fled, completely unnerved by the onslaught. They thought that two demons had been let loose against them, and, indeed, the boys swung their clubs with a vicious energy that was considerably akin to the ferocity attributed to demons.

As the Fijians fled, Dan pressed after them. But Halse had his eye now on other quarry. Nalila had retreated to that part of the pool where it abutted on the smooth face of the cliff. There was no means of escape by ascent, while to leap from the edge would mean to be dashed to pieces on the jagged rocks some twenty feet below. The only escape was by the rim of the bowl—but that was the part along which Halse was advancing with club raised to strike, and relentless vengeance in his staring eyes.

Deserted by his friends and facing a merciless enemy, Nalila lost all his former bravado. The club fell from his nerveless fingers, and rattled upon the boulders beneath. The man's body seemed to shrink in his fear, and he clung close to the smooth wall behind him.

"Turanga ! I am your slave !" the man whined.

Not a word did the boy utter in reply. A murderer—a fugitive from justice—a fiend who would have led ignorant people back into the horrors of the dark days ! The boy had no pity for such a man.

Quickly he advanced and swung his club aloft for the deadly blow.

But just as the boy swung the weapon to strike, Nalila was suddenly raised up into the air—shrieking and screaming for all the powers to save him.

One of the great snaky arms had twined itself around the Fijian's body, and swung him from his perilous position to one of still greater peril !

Just for a few moments was the struggling body swayed above the surface of the pool, while the great tentacles twined about him to make their victim secure. Then, with a final shriek of agony that was choked in gurgling water, the evil man disappeared. The waters closed over him—smooth and still once more.

Thus the adventure ended. Deprived of the malign influence of their late leader, the Fijians were easily subdued. Many of them had been severely injured in the fight, but (Fijian-like) they bore no ill-will. Indeed, they treated the strangers with kindness and, when the next day brought a favouring breeze, they sped the three voyagers on their way with all things needful for their comfort.

Next week a police cutter from Viti Levu visited the island. The officers returned in a few days to report to head-quarters :

"Gatu Loa is still uninhabited, though we found signs that it had been recently visited."

# THE BUNYIP<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER I

### THE NEW CHUM

DAVE MACRAE was fresh from Scotland. When he came to work for Mr. Lomond on the little bachelor farm at Winter Creek he hardly knew a cow from a goat. He was a city lad whose holidays had seldom been spent farther from home than at the nearest seaside resort.

But Dave had always longed for an open-air life. So he took the first opportunity to come to Australia when his schooldays were over, and being a bright, sturdy fellow he soon made himself useful to his easy-going boss, and he found that life was very pleasant among the gum trees of his new home.

It was not long before Dave made the acquaintance of Tom Woodcraft, a lad of his own age, and the son of one of the older farmers of the district. Tom was an Australian through and through, but he readily made a pal of the young Scot, and it was his great delight to teach Dave all he knew of the lore of the bush.

Some of that "teaching" was not always free from a little harmless exercise of the popular sport called "leg-pulling." But Macrae was not thin-skinned. He could take a joke, and return one with interest sometimes.

The boys were returning from a Saturday afternoon

<sup>1</sup> A mysterious animal-demon, thus named by Australian aborigines.

## The Bunyip

ramble, and had seated themselves for a final yarn on a log by the gate of Lomond's section, when Macrae spoke of a "swaggy" he had seen.

"I can tell you this, Tom," he said; "I've seen many queer folk in Scotland, and you don't have to come to Australia to see tramps, good and bad. But that man was the queerest chap I've ever set eyes on."

"You'll see many a strange swaggy in these parts before you have been here for a year," Tom remarked. "Some swaggies are decent enough; others are—well, you want to keep a sharp eye on your belongings while they are about."

"Just so," agreed Dave. "There has been more than one of them hanging about our place lately. They are just what we call 'tramps' in Scotland."

"No, no!" interrupted Woodcraft, with a laugh. "That is just where you are wrong. A swaggy is not a tramp. If you are on the look out for sudden death, just whisper the word 'tramp' when one of them is within hearing, and you won't have to look for a deep pool to end your days in. A swaggy has a swank that is all his own. He is as proud of his profession as though he were an explorer from the Antarctic."

Macrae sniffed scornfully at his friend's eulogy.

"Well, all I can say is that the chap I saw this morning would have been safer in a cage than wandering about loose," he said. "The man was an explorer, right enough; but the mad places he was exploring were not the kind of places you or I would care to be in. He was living among ghosts and devils."

"Perhaps he was wearing corks?" Woodcraft questioned, and Dave exclaimed excitedly:

"Corks? Losh, man, but they were hanging from

the brim of his old hat like the floats on a fishing net ! But how did you know ? Have you seen him ? ”

“ No, I haven’t seen this particular specimen, but I have seen others like him,” was the reply. “ When a swaggy becomes ‘ queer,’ as you call it, that is one of the signs of his queerness. And he takes to fighting his swag——”

“ Just like this chap ! Man ! I never saw anything like it ! First he put it up against a tree ; then he knocked it down. Next, he kicked it, and put it up, knocked it down again for all the world like a clown in a circus. And all the time he was yelling and swearing something horrible. But that wasn’t all. After a bit he got tired of the fighting. So he sat down at the roadside, took out a bit of string and a bent pin, and began fishing—fishing in his billy-can ! ”

At this last piece of information Tom turned to his companion, and asked with chaffing humour :

“ Did he catch anything ? ”

But Dave was too interested in his subject for the moment to note the teasing tone in his friend’s voice, and he answered sympathetically :

“ Poor chap ! I was really sorry for him. He thought he had a fine catch, for he took the fish off his hook one after the other, and laid them on the ground beside him. It wasn’t all amusement to see a fellow catching fish that weren’t there at all.”

At this remark Tom could restrain his merriment no longer, and he broke into a loud peal of laughter.

“ Dave ! You’ll be the death of me. To see swaggies catching fish in their billies ! The next thing you see will be a bunyip——”

“ A what ? ” questioned Macrae, for this was a new

Australian word to him. "What's a bunyip? A bird, or a beast, or what?"

"Ah, that is one of the mysteries of Australia," Tom responded, lowering his voice to a suitable pitch of awe as he readily entered into the spirit of friendly leg-pulling again. "There is many a man in Australia who would be glad to be able to answer that question. The bunyip is a mystery of mysteries—one of Australia's greatest wonders. It is said to be a sort of shapeless monster that haunts the bush and marshes—something between a goblin and a vampire—"

"How many legs has it got?" the practical Scot interrupted. He was interested, but he was over-hungry for facts. This was too much for Tom. He gave up the rôle of ghost spinner without further effort, and answered the question with mock reproof.

"Dave! You are too much for me. How do you expect that I am to educate you into the mysteries of bunyips when you interrupt me at the most exciting part by asking me how many legs a bunyip has? No good Australian speaks of a bunyip without respect."

"Yet I suppose a bunyip has to walk," the Scot persisted. "And, if it walks, it must have a pair of legs, at least?"

"It may have a thousand, for all I know to the contrary," said Woodcraft. "Nobody knows, because nobody has seen it. The blacks are said to know more about bunyips than any other people. They say that it is some kind of horrible creature that can do the most terrible things. It can tear you to bits as soon as look at you—"

"Then it has hands. That's a comfort," com-

mented Dave. "I was beginning to think that it rolls about like a ball, without hands or feet."

Tom sighed with exhaustion at the effort to teach Dave due reverence.

"It may have hands, or it may have claws, or it may have only feet without fingers, toes, or claws, for all I know," he said.

Macrae sighed wearily in his turn.

"It beats me," he remarked. "I like things that I can understand. Now, this"—(with sudden hope of a little clear understanding at last)—"perhaps the bunyip sings?"

"Oh, yes," rejoined Tom. "It sings all right—like a thousand black angels all rolled into one. People who say that they have heard the bunyip will tell you that it makes the most blood-curdling sounds that anyone could imagine—that it wails like a person in terrible agony; and then moans and cries and laughs in a way that makes your blood run cold."

"Just like somebody putting ice-cream down your back. Listen!"

The last word came from the boy's throat with a sudden gasp of horror, for, just while he had been speaking, there broke upon the dusky night a wild cry that could be likened only to that of a soul in uttermost distress. That was at first. Then it was resolved into peals of demon laughter. The gum trees caught the sounds, and sent them echoing and re-echoing through the bush until it seemed to the boys that they must indeed be surrounded by hosts of unseen, gibbering demons.

At least that was how they afterwards described the experience. Neither believed in either ghosts or

demons, though, boylike, the subject was a fascinating one to talk about. But it would be false to pretend that the sudden interruption to their talk did not, for the moment, half scare the life out of both.

At the first sound of the unearthly cries the boys instantly jumped from the log on which they had been sitting and turned to each other with faces scared and questioning. Macrae was the first to speak, and he questioned with gasping breath in an awed undertone :

“ Man alive ! What’s—what’s that ? ”

Even as the question was asked, again the strange cries were repeated, and they seemed to be even wilder than before—if such were possible. But by this time the boys had recovered their scattered senses, and Tom’s bushman instinct at once sought for a possible solution to the puzzle.

“ It must be a wild cat, or some bird,” he suggested. “ These cries sound different at night among the trees—especially when you can’t see the creatures.”

Dave grunted disapprovingly.

“ If they’re the kind of dickey-birds you have in these parts, I would rather have the cries of devils themselves,” was his rejoinder.

“ Perhaps it was a bunyip,” Tom slyly suggested, to which Macrae responded unromantically.

“ All I can say is that, if it’s the bunyip, he must have swallowed something that’s upset him badly ! ”

As further waiting resulted in no repetition of the mysterious sounds, the boys decided that home and tea were the next matters of importance. Woodcraft proposed that Dave should accompany him, but the latter did not accept the invitation.

"I'd like fine to go with you, if only to save you from the bunyip's clutches," Dave said. "But Mr. Lomond is away in town, and won't be back to-night, so there are things I've got to see to on the farm. What about coming over later to keep me company? It will be a fine, moonlight night—if you're not afraid."

"Afraid?" laughed Tom. "It would take more than old women's yarns about bunyips, and the screaming of wild cats to scare me. I expect you are the more frightened of the two. So I'll come over after tea and spend the night with you. So-long for the present. You'll see me back again in a couple of hours or so. I'll take the short cut over the hill opposite."

## CHAPTER II

### MAN OR DEMON ?

**I**T was not long before Dave had milked the couple of cows, and performed the other necessary duties before he was free to settle down for the rest of the night. Then, when he had finished his solitary tea, he found an interesting book, and made himself comfortable before a log fire, there to await the anticipated visit from Tom.

But Woodcraft was long in making an appearance. On similar previous occasions, it had been Tom's custom to announce his approach well in advance by coo-eeing from the top of the hill which rose at the side of the little valley opposite to the slope on which Lomond's farm was situated. On this occasion, however, Dave waited the signal for some time in vain ; but he knew that Tom would keep his promise if possible, so he just continued to read patiently, though his ears were constantly alert for the first sound of his friend's coming.

Whether it was the natural restlessness of expecting someone who might arrive at any moment, or the excitement of recent events that prevented the boy from finding much interest in the book, we cannot say, but, time after time, Dave found himself half dreaming in front of the fire, with his book lying idle on his knees, and his thoughts wandering to Tom's vivid description of the bunyip.

Now, Macrae was not what one would call a superstitious boy. He had no belief in ghosts or mysterious

voices. But when a fellow is left by himself in a lonely bush house, some distance from neighbours, amid crowds of gum trees, and bush voices the only sounds that break the forest silence—well, even the strongest wills are likely to feel the need for human company.

Dave was no exception to the rule. His nerves were undoubtedly on the alert, and when an owl passing over the roof let loose its mournful hoot, the lad was more startled than he cared to admit to himself. The word "bunyip" once again sprang into his mind, even though he knew that the disturber of the night was harmless.

Immediately Dave became angry with himself for his weakness.

"I must be going daft," he said severely. "There is no such thing, and that I know well. What a fool I am to let myself be scared with fairy tales. I wonder what's keeping Tom? It's not like him to be so late as this. I think I'll go out and cut another supply of wood from the pile, so as to have a good blaze ready for him when he does come."

Partly with this intention, and partly to force himself to shake off the nervous feelings which were trying to get the better of him, the boy rose briskly from the arm-chair, and turned towards the back-door of the house. But he had not taken a couple of steps before he suddenly halted, and his nerves were again in the grip of numb fear, for once more a terrible wailing cry was flung out upon the night air. It seemed to come like tongues of sound twining themselves round the gum trees—coming ever swiftly nearer and nearer, louder and louder.

"Snakes alive!" the boy gasped. "What on earth can it be?"

But the only answer to his question of horror was a repetition of the cries. A man in torture could not have uttered any sound more blood-curdling; no demon could have let loose mad laughter more unearthly than the inhuman merriment that followed the wail.

"Whatever it is, it comes from the hill where Tom should be coming," Dave decided. "I think I'll take a rifle and go out to meet him. He might be a bit nervous, being alone in the bush."

Dave turned with intent to put that suggestion into effect but, as he did so, he heard the cry once more. This time it was plainly but an exclamation of someone in a great rage. Instantly that cry was followed by another—the words "Help! Help!" clearly repeated. And then the whole truth flashed upon Dave.

"The swaggy! Mad as they make them—and Tom. It's his voice. He's in trouble. I must go to him!"

That was enough for the young Scot. He was convinced that in some way his pal had fallen foul of the mad swaggy, and that some terrible tragedy had taken place. He snatched up the rifle that always stood ready loaded in a corner of the room. Then he hurriedly put out the lamp, and dashed down the slope towards the road below.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BUNYIP'S FATE

PUSHING his way through the thick scrub, in frantic haste, Dave reached the slope of the farther hill. There he paused for a few moments and called loudly :

" Tom ! Tom ! Are you there ? "

Hearing no immediate answer, he then hastened up on the track which his pal usually followed to and from his father's farm. Then he thought he heard a faint cry in the distance. He listened, but although the sound was not repeated, he felt convinced that he had heard something—that it was not his imagination that had deceived him, and that the cry had come from somewhere on his right. That was where Nature had taken a clean slice from the highest part of Twin-tree Hill, and left a precipice more than a hundred feet in height.

So, with palpitating heart, Dave quickened his steps in that direction. Then once more he paused to call. That was when he found himself right on the brink of the cliff and looking far into space beyond—a veritable death-trap to strange feet wandering in the night, for the heavy bush flourished to the very edge of the declivity.

" Tom ! Are you there ? " he called. And this time—from far below where he was standing—there came an answer :

" Help ! Take care—the swaggy ! "

Instantly Dave dropped upon his knees to peer

downwards. Yes, there, on a ledge some twenty feet below, was a huddled form that moved slightly. He called again, but this time there was no answer. Macrae did not question for a moment that the form was that of his chum—unconscious—probably badly wounded.

What was to be done?

The boy knew that the descent of the face of that sheer cliff would be perilously difficult in the daytime. In the night, even with bright moonlight to guide him, it would be impossible. The only hope was that it could be done with the help of a rope. This must be procured. That meant a return to the farm and considerable delay while the rope was being fetched.

Who knew what might happen during his absence? A sudden spasm of pain and his pal, now miraculously saved for the time, would roll over the ledge to be shattered upon the rough boulders fifty feet beneath.

But a rope was the only hope for effecting a rescue, so it was with the speed of desperation that Dave sprang up and rushed back to Lomond's farm. In record time he covered the distance, and with equal speed he returned to the edge of the cliff.

Hastily joining two ends of the couple of ropes which he had brought with him so as to form a single line, Dave took a double turn of it round the trunk of a tree, after which he made a loop at one end sufficient for a stirrup, and placed a piece of thick bark at the edge of the cliff to prevent the rope from fraying. Then he gripped the line firmly with both hands and cautiously proceeded to lower himself over the face of the precipice.

The only thing to be done was to fasten the helpless Tom to one end of the rope, then to return to the summit and seek help from Woodcraft's home.

This decision Dave immediately proceeded to put into effect. He secured his friend. Then he placed one foot in the loop as before, and began to pull himself steadily towards the ledge. But hardly had the boy ascended two or three yards when right above him came once again the bunyip's cries, so unexpected that he nearly lost his grip upon the rope. At the same moment the rope began to swing violently from side to side. Dave looked up, when, to his horror, he saw a grotesque figure bending over the cliff and gripping the rope, while exerting every effort to shake the climber from his hold. Then a deep voice chuckled with glee, saying :

"Not dead yet? You would come back again, would you? Oh, the fun of it! You shall swing—swing—until you fall—down—down—down—right into the middle of the earth. Ha! Ha! Oh, the fun of it! Right into the middle of the earth!"

It needed no second glimpse to reveal the identity of the man. The old hat, with its dangling corks, the long, shaggy beard, the wild eyes glittering with the frenzy of madness—these were enough to tell of the mad swaggy.

"What's the matter with you, you old fool?" cried Dave angrily. "I am not going to harm you!"

The man laughed, as well he might.

"Harm me?" he jeered. "I have no fear of devils. I was sent to kill the lot of them. I killed you once, and I must kill you again—away down in the middle of the earth. Oh, the fun of it!"

Ha ! Ha ! " And again the madman broke into wild laughter.

It was a precarious position for the boy. He could not advance, for the man had now succeeded in getting such a swing upon the rope that it moved with the wide sweeps of a gigantic pendulum, grazing Dave's body against the face of the rock, and taking all his attention to prevent himself from more serious injury. Even if he could have climbed to the top, what chance would he have had against such an enemy waiting for him ?

Then the end of the adventure came with unexpected swiftness. With cries of delight, the swaggy put his whole strength into the swinging of the rope. He tugged and laughed, while all the time he continued to describe luridly the fate to which he was soon to send his unfortunate victim. But suddenly the cries of joy gave place to a single shriek of agony.

Dave looked upwards and saw that the swing of the rope had dragged the man from his balance. The swaggy saw his own danger too. But he was too late. Over he came and let go the rope ! He flung out his arms and gripped frantically at the air. Next instant, shrieking in terror, the man plunged downwards to a terrible death upon the boulders far below.

Some time passed before Dave was able to recover a position steady enough to enable him to resume the ascent. But, when this object was attained, it was not long before he had pulled himself back to the security of the solid ground. A brief breathing-space, then he hastened to the Woodcraft farm for assistance, and soon the strong arms of Tom's father and uncle

had raised the helpless lad from his dangerous resting-place, and carried him home.

There, under suitable attention, the boy soon recovered consciousness. Fortunately, the mishap proved to be not very serious, and, after a time, Tom was able to explain how the swaggy had suddenly surprised him while crossing the hill to Lomond's farm. There had been a slight struggle with the madman, who ultimately succeeded in pushing the boy over the cliff.

"And now the bunyip has gone the same road himself," was Dave's pitying comment at the end of the story.

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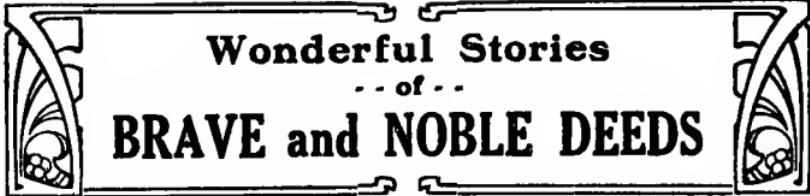
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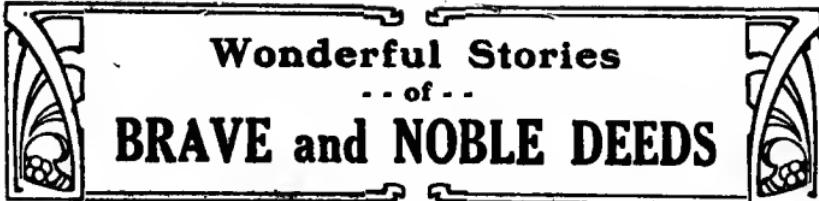
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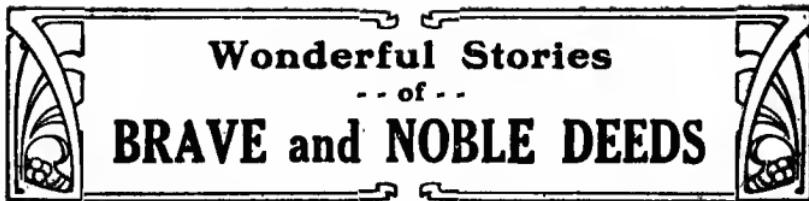
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